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MAY, 1919
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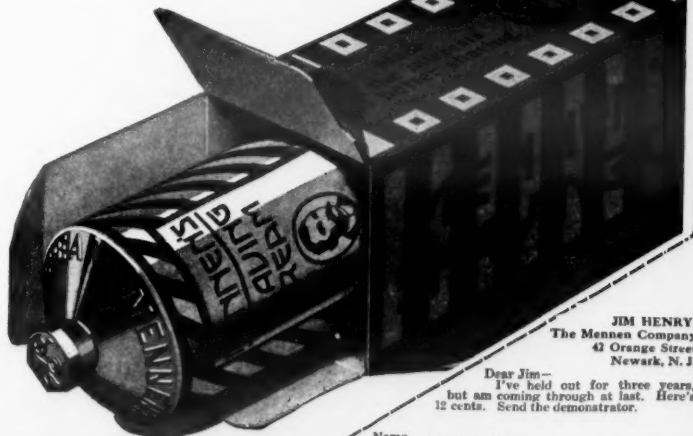
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AINSLIE'S

The Magazine That Entertains

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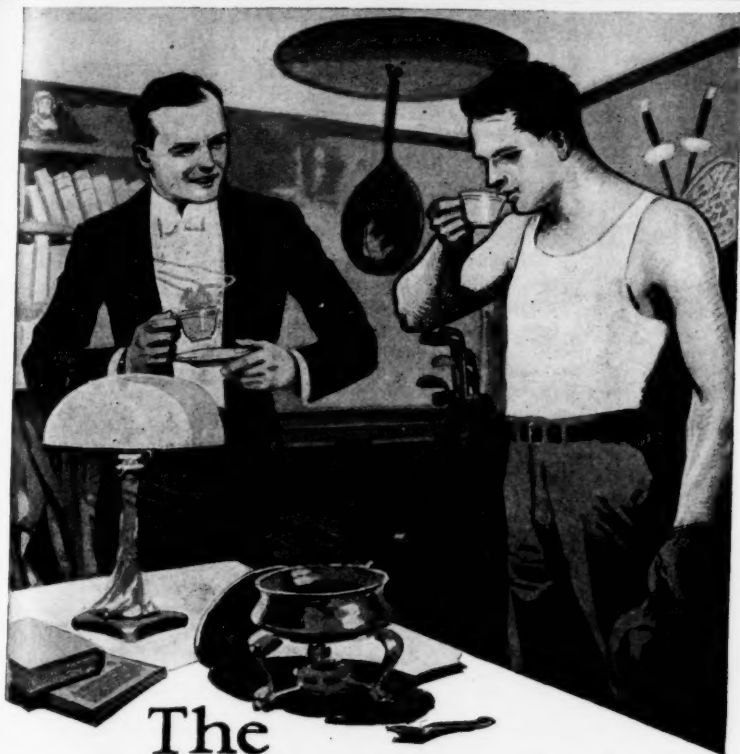
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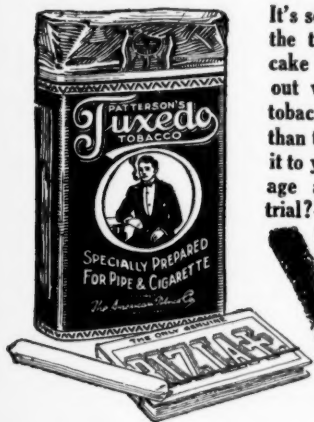
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AINSLIEE'S

VOL. XLIII.

JULY, 1919.

No. 6.



The Ways They Loved Laura

By Randolph Bartlett

Author of "The Escapades of Ann,"
"Her Contract and Her Husband," etc.

CHAPTER I.

PHILIP BRAND, reclining in a long deck chair, was steering by the stars. He was not navigating the yacht, for it was at anchor off Newport. It was his life for which he sought new channels, a life that also seemed to be anchored off Newport. So he had slipped away from his guests unnoticed, and in this secluded spot regarded the stars searchingly, as if to find guidance and chart. He was not entirely unconscious of the sounds of music and dancing that floated to his retreat, but as this, in a measure, represented his life anchorage, it only intensified his quest.

He had business with the stars. They furnished a specific point, far removed from present circumstance, from which to embark upon his mental voyage of self-discovery. He steered the course of his thoughts from star to star, and at last, with a sudden gripping of the sides of his chair, he made port. He had reached a momentous decision, and he registered a vow by all the constellations that it should be final. If the

stars winked at each other derisively, he did not notice.

Having arrived in port, the sounds of merriment below struck a more insistent note. From the sort of frivolity they represented he held himself aloof, not because of an assumption of superiority, but from sheer lack of interest. To him it was not, in the finest sense, frivolity. Real, downright play he could understand and appreciate—the sort of play into which one might fling oneself with the abandon of a child—but all he could see about him was a desperate endeavor to play at play, which seemed utterly stupid. At times he feared he was becoming blasé, a thought that terrified him, for to possess the world's golden key at something less than thirty and find no doors he desired to open would be bitterly ironical, and he abhorred the thought that man was created as a butt for the laughter of the gods.

But such thoughts soon passed, for Philip Brand was inherently an optimist. Besides, he had too often felt the thrill of life, the quickening of the

pulse, the sharp intake of breath at some exquisite and unexpected experience, to remain long convinced that he was a failure in the business of living. He could recall with specifically defined delight how his emotions had been stirred from time to time in his wanderings. Out-of-the-way places had always interested him, especially in the Mediterranean countries and the Orient. He felt the thrill almost of a present experience in recalling the tinkle of distant temple bells keeping time to the saraband of palm branches, the languorous grace of a Neapolitan flower girl, the crags of Scotland, the shimmering whiteness of a stretch of African coast, the unfathomable eyes of a Benares holy man—all these, and certain rare, silent moods of Laura Stratford.

Laura was in no silent mood tonight. Several times he had heard her laughter, so easily distinguished in the cackling chorus. She was dancing, of course; with Martin Hellman, probably. At dinner she had seemed more beautiful, more desirable, than ever. From time to time, in the midst of the merry clatter, her eyes had found his, searched them an instant with an indefinable question, and turned away. But this—and Philip made a mental gesture—this, after all, was her whole existence. He believed she preferred him above all the others, but would she prefer him to the exclusion of the others? He himself was conscious of having reached a dividing line in his life, which he must cross into a new and broader existence or remain forever as he was, a mere spectator of that life into which circumstances had drawn him. Whether Laura would cross that line with him—whether, in fact, he could be positive that he wanted her to cross it with him—were questions he could not yet answer.

Between them there never had been spoken words of love, but there had

been occasional potent silences. The subtle essence of these moments Philip never had distilled completely. He doubted their permanent value. He was disinclined to regard them as revelations of the real Laura, but saw in them, rather, isolated and somewhat exotic phenomena of a personality normally robust, vivid, and self-sufficient. The easily acquired exotic pose, so frequently adopted to conceal vacuity, he saw everywhere about him. He felt that Laura was incapable of adopting such an attitude, since her active intelligence must rebel against it, but he feared that immurement in the prison house of conventionality might lead her unconsciously into outward conformation with her surroundings. And outward conformation is the first step toward inward capitulation.

If Laura Stratford had become one of those merely decorative creatures whose noblest thoughts are concerned with silken life and social conquest, only the system could be blamed. Wealth and beauty were hers by inheritance, and these highly desirable gifts the system has transformed into handicaps against the development of woman's individuality by decreeing that their possessor needs nothing else in life. "The world is yours—why strive?" the system says in effect, its ideal being to have rather than to be.

Therefore, inevitably, Laura was correct. In fact, her friends regarded her as extremely conservative. For example, when fashion decreed it permissible for skirts to clear the ground by six inches, Laura's hovered between four and five. The season when the smartest bodice was that which seemed to be a wisp of chiffon, flung on as an afterthought, Laura's were unmistakably permanent. During a theatrical deluge of smart indecency, she stayed away from the playhouse. She danced the tango in its more æsthetic manifestations, but avoided those gyrations

in which grace is ousted by violence and the drum is the principal instrument in the orchestra. This was not prudishness, but fastidiousness. To her the human body was a shrine too sacred to be exposed to Cook's tourists. And because it was a shrine, she believed that it should be properly adorned. From her dainty feet to her crown of burnished copper hair, she considered thoughtfully all the principles and accessories of her habiliments, not that she might please others so much as that she might be on the best of terms with herself. She glowed with health and abounding physical vigor, but if her cheeks or lips happened to be too pale for the dark blue of her eyes, she counted it hardly less than a duty to employ a touch of color.

Yet beneath this immaculate and patrician exterior, there burned steadily a flame of individuality that not all the conventions could utterly quench. Her actions she dedicated to society, her thoughts remained her own. When those thoughts or ideals conflicted with the routine to which she seemed committed, Laura found refuge in silent and dignified retreat. She never rebelled openly, perhaps because no crisis had yet arisen which seemed worth a battle. A sharp quiver of scorn, a little upward tilt of her chin, and she turned away from that which was displeasing. So she appeared utterly self-contained, and so Philip regarded her. Yet he had sensed emotional forces in her, as when, listening to some great symphony, she had sat beside him, full lips slightly parted and bosom rising rhythmically with her deep breathing, until, at the close, she would turn toward him with a quick and almost frightened glance. Then, after a moment of silence, she would be her own calm self again. Recollections of these moments disturbed Philip's resolution, and as he pondered, he heard a soft, reproachful voice:

"So this is where you are hiding—our patent, disappearing host."

Philip rose from his chair as the white-clad figure of Laura approached in the darkness.

"Cottle manages these affairs much better than I," he protested. "What more could I do than turn over the yacht to you?"

"A steward!" Laura exclaimed. "You're hardly polite."

"I know. My manners are atrocious. But I've been thinking."

"On a June night! June was made for feeling, not thinking."

"To feel is better than to know," of course. And what have you been feeling?"

"Neglected."

Instantly Laura wished she had not said it. To suggest that she considered herself entitled to his attentions was to assert a claim for which she had no foundation. So, as Philip did not reply, she made it impersonal:

"I mean we all have felt neglected."

"I'm sorry," Philip replied perfunctorily.

For a few moments, neither spoke. Philip leaned back in his chair and regarded the stars again, to regain his grasp upon his decision. Laura, seated close beside him, looked down at him and then across the water. At last Philip cleared his throat.

"I'm going away," he said, studying his tone carefully to avoid any suggestion of the dramatic.

Laura, startled, turned quickly toward him. The surprise caught her breath, and she waited a moment for him to explain.

"You mean you're going back to New York?" she asked.

"Anywhere but New York," he replied.

"Then where?"

"The Orient, I think. Persia, perhaps, or India."

"But why?"

Philip drew a deep breath, seemed about to answer, and remained silent. Then, choosing his words, he said:

"There's something wrong somewhere. Things don't interest me. I need a change, a new viewpoint. I'm in a rut and I must get away."

A strange feeling of helplessness came over Laura. She did not want him to go, not because of that eternally feminine impulse which seems to force some women involuntarily to strive to retain their hold upon men without specific motive, but because the prospect of a round of days and months with no Philip in the background brought a sense of loneliness. As with most women of her class, the tradition of concealment and suppression of emotion had become a dominant instinct, and therefore she could not be certain that she loved him. Such a conviction would have simplified her course. Lacking that, she still believed that an outspoken desire on her part would cause Philip to change his plans, but she hesitated to commit herself openly. Had she but known it, this very indecision of character was at the bottom of Philip's determination to go away, and if, in that tense moment, she had permitted her desires to outweigh her training, the course of events might have been entirely different. As it was, she heard herself inquiring, almost mechanically, how long he expected to be gone.

"I haven't the slightest idea," he replied, half rising from his chair as a delicate hint for her to suggest that they rejoin the others.

The moment of transition had passed, a moment as brief as that in which the drop of water hesitates at the crest of a divide, before starting toward the southern or the northern seas. And Philip and Laura, perhaps with as little control over their own fates as drops of water, were embarked upon

devious and diverging streams of adventure.

CHAPTER II.

"I wonder, Phil, if you realize just what you are doing," Pierre Dufresne tentatively inquired a few days later.

Pierre enjoyed the privilege of being outspoken toward Philip, by reason of the fact that they were neighbors. That is to say, from the windows of the Brand ancestral mansion on the north side of Washington Square, one could see the windows of Pierre's studio on the south side. A friendship that could bridge such a gulf as that which divides the art colony from the *ancien régime* carries unusual prerogatives. Philip admired and liked Pierre, and for Philip's sake Pierre was found in many a gathering that otherwise he could not have endured, even though one of the compensations was a lucrative popularity as a painter of portraits. Philip had crossed the Square to say good-by.

"And I expected your immediate and vociferous approval," he said, "after all your lectures on the futility of my existence."

"So you think you are immediately transformed into a useful member of society by running away from it?" Pierre asked.

"Only so I can get a better view of it, and of my position in it," Philip explained.

"It's one thing to get far enough away from a thing to see it in its true proportions and to get a perspective, and another to go so far you can't see it at all."

"I shan't lose sight of anything important."

"But she may lose sight of you."

Philip turned upon the artist quickly.

"What do you mean?"

"You know well enough whom I mean. You love Laura Stratford."

"I'm not sure," Philip mused. "To

persons in our circumstances, the word 'love' comes with a dangerous ease. All our emotions are so superficial that any liking just a little keener than the ordinary seems unduly important. That is the great peril—drifting into matrimony because it is such a simple and obvious course."

"So you propose to employ the test of time and space," observed Pierre.

"Exactly."

"And if, at the end of six months or a year, you find you cannot be comfortable without Miss Stratford, you intend to come back and marry her."

"You state the fact uncouthly."

"What, then, if you should come back only to find her already married?"

Philip considered for the space of time required to light a cigarette.

"Then," he said deliberately, "I should know that we had escaped a marriage foredoomed to failure."

"Oh, fool!" Pierre exclaimed impatiently. "Oh, blithering, inconsistent fool! You have just said, in effect, that people marry because they are bored and accept the first approximation of love that they encounter. Yet, without giving this girl any inkling of your feelings, you leave her here to be bored and to drift into that accidental matrimony."

"If her affection is sound, she will not drift," Philip insisted stubbornly.

"Inconsistent and also egotistical fool!" Pierre sneered. "You forget that marriage is essential to sane women. You eliminate yourself. Miss Stratford's necessity remains, and she takes the line of least resistance. You are making her an easy prey for Hellman."

"Rot!"

"And Hellman's intentions are horribly dishonorable."

"What do you mean?"

"He wants to marry her."

"More of your inverted morals," Philip laughed.

"Not at all. There are three common motives for marriage, and his is the lowest. The highest would be the appreciation of her personality, of which Hellman is incapable. The next highest would be to marry her for her money, where at least the commercial ethics obtain, but as Hellman is wealthier than she, that cannot be his motive. There remains only the third—physical obsession. And for the sake of a fantastic theory, you are sacrificing the woman you love to a sensualist!"

"The idea that Laura could be won by such a man is preposterous," Philip replied.

"Phil, for the love of Heaven, go to the Orient and learn the beginning of wisdom as it concerns women! I give up!" and Pierre gestured despair.

"It is you who are the theorist," Philip declared. "I'm steering by dead reckoning."

"You mean that, even if you run your ship aground, you know you have taken the right course. The operation is a success even if the patient dies. Against this dogmatic view, logic beats its wings in vain. There's nothing more to be said."

If the artist's warnings disturbed Philip's mind, he gave no sign. It was not without much hesitation that he had reached his determination, and he refused to be influenced now. It was well enough for an outsider to theorize, but he had lived through the elements that led to his resolution, and whether or not Pierre's predictions were justified, Philip felt that he never could be satisfied without carrying out his plan, and a few days later he sailed.

CHAPTER III.

From Newport, the Stratfords flitted to the Adirondacks, from the Adirondacks to White Sulphur, from White Sulphur to the Berkshires. Laura's father was dead, and her mother, always

fond of change, never had found Laura so tractable and easy to move from colony to colony. At her slightest suggestion, Laura gave orders to pack.

As a faithful adherent of the time-honored tenets, Mrs. Stratford regarded the promotion of a suitable marriage for her daughter as her first duty in life. She had looked upon Philip as her son-in-law elect, and had expected the summer season to clinch the matter, planning a series of brilliant engagement affairs for the ensuing winter, with a fashionable wedding at St. Thomas' in June. Philip's sudden departure was disturbing, the more so because, when she tried, with infinite tact, to sound her daughter on the situation, she met only an uncompromising refusal to discuss it.

Now Laura's reticence concerning Philip might mean either of two things—that she was very hard hit, or that she was not in the least interested. In either event, Mrs. Stratford conceived it her duty to aid, so far as possible, in the establishing of a substitute. Her own marriage had been one of convenience, and it had been quite successful. Always alert, though perhaps her observations seldom pierced beneath the surface, she was quite satisfied, from what she had seen of life, that conventionally correct marriages were quite as likely to prove congenial as those that were based upon emotion. So, while she would have taken most extreme measures to save Laura from unhappiness, her own pride impelled her to make smooth the path for eligible suitors. A beautiful unmarried daughter seemed to her a reflection upon the generalship of a mother, and, keeping ever in mind the obvious fact that Laura could have her choice of a great variety of desirables, Mrs. Stratford, with calm, dispassionate eye, considered the narrowing circle.

Laura would have been stupid indeed if she had been entirely unconscious of

all this, but it was a game which she had seen played so frequently among her friends that she was amused rather than annoyed. Strong in her knowledge that, after all, she was mistress of the situation, she accepted the benevolent intrigue as part of the summer frolic, and went serenely on her way.

Meanwhile, Pierre Dufresne—curiously enough, in view of his lack of interest in fashionable society—had become a close student of the society pages of the daily papers. Thus he noted that, only one day after the Stratfords left Newport for the Adirondacks, Martin Hellman followed them. When they flitted South, their movements were simultaneous, and a few weeks later the Stratfords were Hellman's guests on a prolonged motor tour that began in Virginia and ended in Massachusetts.

"Propinquity," Pierre reflected, "is nine points of the law of love. This thing must be stopped."

So he wrote to Miss Laura Stratford at Lenox:

"You will recall, perhaps, that you consented some time ago, at the request of Mr. Brand, to permit me to paint your portrait. Unavoidable postponements intervened at the time, of which I am now very glad. I should like to come to Lenox, where I hear you and your mother are established for the remainder of the season, and make the portrait with a woodland background, something rather different from ordinary portraiture. Your type of beauty makes you one of the few women who would harmonize with such a composition, and I believe we can evolve something that will delight our friend Philip."

Whatever the outcome, Pierre reasoned, this would at least bring back memories of the wandering one. If the scheme worked, he might be able, in the association of artist and subject, further to undermine whatever influence Hellman had acquired.

The year was at that moment of pause when Nature, in her most voluptuous mood, hesitates between summer and autumn. Even the tidy woods and fields of New England were enjoying their bacchanalian hour, the single orgy of their puritan year. Broad-bosomed earth, throbbing with creative instinct, poured out a flood of sights and sounds and fragrances of abundant life. It was such a season as drove the Pilgrims, panicstricken at the glorious sensuousness, to declare a religious festival, at the same time compelling them to postpone the devotions until frosty nights had tempered something of the madness of the earth spirits.

Laura had never been more keenly alive with the fine joy vitality. Many longing eyes were turned toward her, but her mother and Hellman had succeeded in conveying subtly the impression that only certain formalities remained before she would be ticketed "Sold" upon the marriage market. Hellman was no fool, and he knew the value of unobtrusive persistence. He may have had little knowledge of the depths of woman's character, but he was thoroughly conversant with woman's whims. His very adaptability made him dangerous.

There was a dance at the hotel. Laura and Hellman strolled out upon the veranda. The gold of the low-hanging harvest moon was tinged with red, and long, interlacing shadows made the wooded lawn a playground for the pixies. Dream-distilling wine was in the air, and Laura drank deep of it. The night called, and, hardly knowing that Hellman walked beside her, she moved slowly out among the shadows. The man sensed the magic of the earth and understood that his cause was best urged by his own silence and the voices of nature. They turned into a narrow lane, overarched with elms, and the lights and the music from the hotel were lost. Hellman glanced at Laura, and

saw that she looked straight ahead with an expression almost tense in its immobility. Her white, smooth shoulders gleamed in the occasional splashes of moonlight. Hellman's pulses burned. He touched her bare arm.

"Laura!" He hardly recognized his own voice. His throat was dry.

"Please," she barely breathed, and drew away a little.

"Laura!" he said again pleadingly. He found her hand and lifted it to his lips.

A quiver passed over her.

"I'm cold," she said, crossing her arms over her bosom. "I forgot to bring a wrap. Let's go back," and she turned toward the hotel again.

"Laura, I can't go on like this!" he almost cried. "I don't merely love you—I'm mad about you!"

If he had ever touched her heart, she would have flung herself into his arms that instant. But the spell of the night had been broken, and though she hesitated a little in her step, impressed with the intensity of his emotion, something held her back.

"Please, Martin, not to-night!" she pleaded.

"But when?" he urged. "I can wait, only give me some hope."

"You've been very good to me," she said softly. "I appreciate all your kindness. Some time, perhaps—" and she stopped.

"At least there is no one else?"

"There is no one else." She said it firmly, almost defiantly.

"Then I can wait," he said quietly, and they went back to the lights and the music.

As Laura was going to her room, a clerk handed her the letter from Pierre. She read it, and went out on the little balcony that opened off her room. For a long time, she stood looking into the shadowy distances, and then, with a little impatient movement, she stepped inside and began a note

telling Pierre that he might come to Lenox. But when it was half finished, she tore it up—and sent a telegram instead.

Two days later, Pierre arrived. Laura's welcome was so hearty that he was reassured. Hers was not the demeanor of a woman preoccupied with any serious personal problem. Pierre's loyalty to the friend he regarded as the victim of a foolish and misguided impulse led him to hope that her cordiality was due largely to the fact that he came, in a measure, as an ambassador from Philip. But he could find nothing to support such a hope. Laura's entire interest was in the portrait, and not in the least in the man who had caused the painting of it. She referred to the inception of the project only once, and then in terms that finally dismissed it.

"Before you begin," she said, "there's one point in your letter I want to correct. The portrait is for myself, not for Mr. Brand. There must have been some misunderstanding."

This was a matter of indifference to Pierre. So far as he was concerned, the portrait might go hang or unchanged. His present intention was merely to monopolize as much of Laura Stratford's time as possible, the while he prayed fervently that one Philip Brand might return to sanity and the United States. He made use of every advantage offered by Laura's interest in the work. Several long motor rides were necessary to find exactly the right sort of landscape for the background. Then Pierre developed temperament. The slightest unfortunate incident would unfit him for work for an entire day. He would discern freakish conditions of light imperceptible to any one else, and explain them at great length, proving conclusively that it was impossible to paint in the open on such days. Thus he managed to destroy the better part of three weeks. Mrs. Stratford fidgeted, and Hellman became almost a

nervous wreck in fighting down his impotent rage. Mrs. Stratford finally protested.

"It seems to me there's a lot of unnecessary dawdling going on over the portrait," she said one day, when Pierre declared that a certain amber effect in the atmosphere made work impossible.

"True!" Pierre exclaimed, jumping to his feet with an exaggerated pretense of regret. "I've been thoughtless, inconsiderate of your time! You must pardon me. I've been trying to do something unusual, but it is not necessary. We need have no more sittings. I'll take the canvas to New York and finish it in my studio."

But Laura would not listen. The picture was taking form, and she was delighted with it; it must be completed where it had been begun. She was firm and waved all debate aside, so they settled down once more to the routine. Then, a week later, when Pierre was almost finished in spite of himself, he noted a strange, almost hard look on Laura's face, as they sat one day in the woodland studio. He tried to paint, but this time he was honestly baffled. He broached all manner of subjects without arousing her interest. Her expression remained unchanged. Finally he made a direct attack:

"You are not yourself to-day, Miss Stratford."

"No?" Her tone was slightly haughty.

Pierre looked at her intently, between narrowed eyelids.

"Don't look at me like that!" she exclaimed, almost harshly. "You make me feel like some strange animal!" and she rose and walked rapidly into the woods.

Pierre whistled softly to himself and kicked at the dead leaves. Something had happened, and he could not guess what it might be. Laura Stratford had never been like this before. In a few

moments she returned, calm and apologetic.

"You were right," she said. "I am not myself to-day. Let's go back to the hotel."

They rode back in silence. That evening Pierre received this note:

DEAR MR. DUFRESNE: I am not well, and I think I shall go to California for a month or so. Will you please finish the portrait at your leisure, as well as possible without further sittings? I shall notify you when I return to New York, and hope by that time it will be completed. I inclose check on account. With sincere regrets,

LAURA STRATFORD.

Puzzled and pessimistic, the artist accepted his dismissal, and left for New York by the morning train. Enlightenment awaited him at his studio in a letter from Philip:

"Dignity and calm. The Orient never has fascinated me as it does on this visit. Here there is joy in pleasure, because it is sought intelligently. Nor is pleasure sought as an end, but only as a phase of life which should not be ignored. The true Oriental of to-day is escaping the religious mania which, in previous ages, impelled him to deny sensation, and is striking a fine balance between sensualism and emotional suicide.

"I feel this very keenly at present, as I have just returned from a visit to a very remarkable potentate, the Swadir of Nakahal. He is a very wealthy reigning prince of a minor state, happily obscure politically. He was educated in a British university, but refuses to abandon his traditional customs. His library is filled with all the modern works on sociology and philosophy, and his harem is peopled with the most beautiful creatures I have ever seen. Yes—he is so unusual as that—he has even permitted me to peek into the abode of his wives.

"I will not go into further detail, because you will see him before many weeks pass. He is going to make a

tour of the United States, and I am giving him letters to you and several other friends. I hope you will entertain him as well as he will entertain you. He is trying to persuade me to return with him, but I am not satisfied yet concerning the object of my adventure. I am writing similarly to Miss Stratford.

"Again let me commend my very dear friend the swadir to your hospitality."

Pierre read the letter three times and cursed picturesquely in several languages. He put the sheets back into the envelope, and noticed that it was postmarked "Benares." Savagely he sketched a tombstone on the back of the envelope, and inscribed thereon:

"Sacred to the memory of the romance of a damned fool and a splendid woman."

IV.

New York is habitually apathetic toward picturesque strangers, unless they are well-defined charlatans. If the sensational visitor is an obvious fraud, New York hovers around him like farmers around the shell game at the county fair, until the schemer reaps his harvest and disappears. The Queen of Sheba might drive down Broadway in a golden chariot drawn by twenty milk-white camels, but unless she carried a banner announcing a vaudeville or movie engagement, she would attract no more attention than a member of the Home Defense League selling War Savings Stamps. A king as such is no novelty. To be anybody, he must be a king with a graft. As for Oriental personages, with their long, flowing robes, long, flowing beards and long, flowing conversation, when a new one appears, Manhattan merely asks whether he is starting a new religion or a new restaurant, ready with impartial and liberal patronage for either. And if the spectacular sojourner does not, within a reasonable time, declare

his intentions, he is either ignored or regarded with disfavor and suspicion as a person whose graft is so cleverly manipulated as to be dangerous.

It was without proclamation of press agent that Philip Brand's friend, the Swadir of Nakahal, arrived in New York. The ship-news reporter learned through a series of monosyllables that he was not on official, political, or commercial business; that he was not planning a lecture tour or a school of dancing; that he did not write poetry; that there were no women in his entourage; that he had no views upon the Turkish situation or the League of Nations; that he had never heard of prohibition and was not interested therein; that he did not know how long he might remain in America. The swadir looked like "copy," and the youth was persistent, but no more of even this negative sort of information could he obtain, for the swadir had entered a victoria beside which stood a dignified Hindu servant, and the reporter was left high and horribly dry.

Assuredly the swadir looked like "copy." To begin at the top, he was crowned with a huge white turban, fastened in front with a large emerald set in a golden crest. This crest, a curiously carved design apparently symbolizing seven suns, seemed to have special significance, for it appeared again on a signet ring, on the decorations of his sandals, and on the shoulder fastening of his robe. The turban came far down on his forehead. His skin was the darkest of copper hues. His mustache and long, square-cut beard were black. His eyes peered out through heavy, smoked glasses. His features were clean cut and well formed. There was a slight suggestion of a hump on his back, but it was not pronounced enough to constitute a real deformity. His outer coat, or robe, was of golden brocade, covered with an intricate design in which the seven suns

repeatedly figured. His voice was pitched extremely low, and he spoke quietly and with great deliberation. His choice of words was perfect, but his enunciation, while easily understood, was thick and labored, as if his tongue rebelled against each syllable, protesting against this strange, foreign speech. He moved with confidence and dignity, as of one for whom all paths have been prepared and whose arrival at an inevitable destination must be expected and announced.

Such was the Swadir of Nakahal, who cared so little what New York thought of him that he snubbed New York's semiofficial representative, the ship-news reporter, receiving in consequence no printed attention save the final paragraph of a brief story devoted to the more notable arrivals on the same ship. This paragraph ran:

"Another passenger was a funny-looking party with long black Belshazzars and a vocabulary of one word—'No.' His make-up was great for advertising cigarettes. The passenger list accuses him of being the Swadir of Nakahal, but his disinclination to explain how one gets that way was so marked that, for the present, speculation grapples vainly with this reticent human cozy corner. As the reporter retreated from a luckless encounter with the swadir, he saw a white horse and a red-headed girl. Upon consulting his dream book, he discovered this to be a warning to persons of psychic tendencies that a tall, dark gentleman will cross their path eftsoons or sooner."

The swadir was consistent in his avoidance of the limelight. A roomy apartment on upper Park Avenue had been prepared for him by the dignified Hindu major-domo who met him at the pier. The principal rooms were furnished with true Oriental magnificence, luxurious and barbaric. Tapestries whose brilliant hues were softened by age and the art of the designer covered

the walls. Broad divans, set in corner nooks, were shrouded by hangings, sometimes of filmiest gossamer and sometimes of fabrics in whose heavy folds there shone a curious iridescence. Horrible monsters glared from the carvings of stiff teakwood chairs, while heaps of skin-caressing cushions belied their menace. Tables inlaid with mother-of-pearl in intricate patterns bore beautiful ivories and vases of rarest form and enamel. The electrical fixtures were inclosed in silken lanterns, which shed a soft and perfectly diffused glow of orange. In the largest room, a fountain splashed lazily into a broad pool where goldfish darted among the lotus lilies. It was all so complete and so harmonious in its unreality that the Avenue seemed a whole planet removed, and had Omar suddenly appeared, it would have been as natural as the chance encounter of a friend in a hotel lobby.

In this retreat the swadir secluded himself. It was late December, but the weather was fine, and several times he drove about town, through the Park, along the Drive, always in a victoria. He had the true Oriental antipathy for machinery and hurry. Automobiles rushed past him, their occupants turning to gaze at the turbaned figure, but he did not return their stares. Writers of feature articles for Sunday newspapers besieged his home, but the major-domo informed them, with the utmost respect and dignity, that his master did not desire to be interviewed. The camera man of a moving-picture news weekly caught him on one of his drives, and he was a ten-seconds' wonder on the screen. One or two paragraphers tossed off airy remarks about him, suggesting that he was probably a reincarnation of Menelik of Abyssinia or the Ahkoond of Swat. With that New York left him to his own devices.

Pierre Dufresne happened upon certain of these references to the swadir,

and hoped the fellow would not present Philip's letter of introduction. In his mind, the potentate had come to share in Brand's disgraceful conduct, and to be, in a measure, responsible for it, though Pierre admitted to himself that this was unworthy of his own professed devotion to logic. But, anyhow, he was not interested in Oriental freaks, and he hoped the swadir would stay away. Laura was still in California, where Hellman had followed her as quickly as appearances permitted, and Pierre expected an announcement of their engagement any day. He was in a belligerent frame of mind toward Philip Brand and everything and every one in any way connected with Philip's absence.

It was thus with him when he received, one day, an impressive-looking envelope, addressed in a curious handwriting and sealed with a huge blob of wax with the insignia of the seven suns. Within the envelope was a piece of parchment, upon which was written:

"The Swadir of Nakahal will receive Mr. Pierre Dufresne at three o'clock in the afternoon of Thursday, the twenty-seventh day of December."

This and the address—no more; no expression of hope that it would suit Mr. Dufresne's convenience; no reference to a letter of introduction from Philip; just a statement of fact, which did not seem to call for the consent of the artist—a declaration of an inevitable event.

"The cheek of the beggar!" Pierre exclaimed, and scribbled a note to the effect that the swadir was talking through his turban, and would not receive Mr. Pierre Dufresne on that day or any other day, unless Pierre happened to be walking in his sleep. This he signed, sealed, addressed, stamped—and burned.

"After all," he reflected, "this swadir, with all his European education, is a mogul, and doubtless considers he is

doing me a great favor. He probably thinks I won't get a wink of sleep from now until Thursday, being overburdened with the honor. Besides, Philip, though a fool, is my friend. I'll go."

Another idea occurred to him, also. Laura soon would be returning to New York. Her mother would not be able to stay away long from the festivities of the society season. If Laura were still free, and if this swadir proved sufficiently adaptable, he might be utilized to keep Laura's interest in Philip from dying entirely. He might divert her mind; might reassure her as to Philip's doings in the Orient; might, in short, be a most valuable ally.

And so, on the day appointed, he presented himself at the home of the swadir, immaculately clad without and panoplied with diplomacy within.

CHAPTER V.

The swadir, seated cross-legged on one end of an L-shaped divan, filling the room with clouds of perfumed smoke from a narghile, did not rise as Pierre entered, but, with a wave of the hand in which he held the mouthpiece of the pipe, invited his visitor to a seat beside him.

"I am delighted to meet a man whom Mr. Philip Brand holds in such high estimation," the swadir remarked, while a servant presented Pierre with a second mouthpiece of the narghile.

"Philip and I disagree on many things," Pierre replied, "but he is my friend."

"You understand of course, Mr. Pierre Dufresne"—the swadir used the full name slowly and formally, not with that touch of satire which attends similar speech by those accustomed to the language—"you understand that only through such differences, or disagreements, are substantial friendships possible."

Pierre started to speak, but a broad

gesture eliminated his comment as either unimportant or premature. The Oriental mind had encountered an abstract idea and was prepared to discourse at great length, perhaps no more to impress or inform the guest than to make more easy its own process of thought by thinking aloud.

"Nothing is more tragic than to be forced to associate daily with persons who invariably agree with us," the swadir continued. "The reason Englishmen are the greatest travelers in the world is that, in the society from which the English traveler comes, every one thinks like every one else, and they travel to escape the perpetual unanimity. They agree upon their food, their drink, their form of government, the destiny of their empire. It is because in England there are such large numbers of influential persons who agree perfectly upon everything that reforms are so difficult, and that the British Empire is so powerful. It is, however, what you might call a condition of static agreement—it stands still, satisfied to maintain that which exists. Now, in America, you have a vast majority in agreement also, but your basis of agreement is economic expansion, not primarily of the nation or of the corporation, but first of all of the individual. The common laborer believes he can be a millionaire; consequently the nation believes it can be a millionaire among nations——"

Pierre was not especially interested, and he lost the thread of the discourse of the swadir upon international and economic affairs, even as the swadir himself had wandered from the fundamentals of friendship into realms of speculation far removed from their source. But the potentate's apparent absorption in his theme gave Pierre an opportunity to study him, and try to discern what manner of person it was who had so captured Philip's fancy.

Instinctively he was drawn toward

the man. He had recovered already from the adverse impression caused by the arrogant form the sender's invitation had assumed, and by his formal and aloof manner. Nor, since the strange individual had almost instantly adopted the attitude of an academic lecturer, could this be on account of what he said, for he was immersed in an impersonal discourse. It was solely that element of individuality which governs nearly all our personal relations, and concerning which it has been said, "It matters but little to our instinctive sympathy that some one should be good or bad, do good or ill, provided that we accept the secret force which animates him." Pierre found himself accepting this secret force in the swadir, and without sanction of his own reason. It mattered not at all what that deep-toned, almost mechanical voice was saying; he realized that, even as with Philip, he and the swadir might disagree, but they could not be enemies.

"You are, perhaps, not interested in sociology?" the swadir at last interrupted himself to say.

"Fact is," Pierre laughed, "I should much rather hear news of Philip."

"Ah, Mr. Philip Brand—a man of curious contradictions, Mr. Dufresne."

"Yes, I know," Pierre hurried to interpose for fear of more Oriental abstractions. "But what's the beggar doing?"

The result of this quite casual question was astonishing. The swadir leaned back upon the divan and closed his eyes. His fingers relaxed, and the mouthpiece of the narghile dropped to the floor. His whole body became limp. He remained thus several moments, while Pierre stared, open-mouthed, wondering if this were some curious kind of fit, and if he should not call the servants. He had almost decided to do so when the swadir began speaking, hardly above a whisper:

"Benares—pilgrims—the Panch-kos

road— The mendicants cry more and more loudly. He is approaching. He flings them a few coins and passes on. He is thinking, but his thoughts are not devout. He invokes the spirit of a woman——"

"Is the woman Laura Stratford?" Pierre exclaimed involuntarily.

The swadir stiffened suddenly and sat upright again, his eyes open.

"Did you get the information you sought?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon," Pierre apologized. "I didn't mean to ask you to do anything occult. I was merely curious to know in a general way what Philip is doing in India."

The swadir recovered the mouthpiece of his narghile and resumed smoking, as if making a mental trip clear around the world were no problem at all. He was so matter-of-fact about it that Pierre could not regard the astral flight seriously, and yet he was impressed.

"I suppose Philip has spoken to you about Miss Stratford," Pierre ventured. After all, there was nothing to be gained by beating about the bush, and he had confidence in the swadir.

"He said she was an excellent type," the swadir answered. "I have a letter to her, but she is traveling."

"She should return soon," Pierre said.

"She will be here within three days," the swadir informed him.

"You have inquired at their house?"

"The Swadir of Nākahal does not parley with menials concerning the friends of his friends," the Oriental said, rather stiffly.

"Pardon," Pierre said humbly. "But you see we of the West are not accustomed to your very direct methods of acquiring information. You have lived in England. You must understand that it is not the general custom merely to shut one's eyes and locate any one you may be thinking about."

"And yet it is so simple. Mr. Philip Brand grasped the principle at once."
 "You don't mean that Philip is getting psychic?"

"Ah, these, too, are matters concerning which one does not gossip," the swadir replied mysteriously.

"One's conversational topics are rather limited, it appears," Pierre observed, a bit tartly.

"Limited to the abstract, limited to the infinite, limited by the elimination of petty personalities and all other finite matters, so far as possible," the swadir began, ignoring the sarcasm in Pierre's tone. "Conversation should deal only with important things. Otherwise, it were more profitable to be silent and think. And the only important things are those which are universal, which explain life, not those which merely litter the ways through which life passes. The difference between the Oriental and the Occidental, Mr. Pierre Dufresne, lies in this—the Oriental thinks incessantly and acts only under pressure of necessity; the Occidental acts incessantly and thinks only under pressure of necessity."

As a social possibility, as an element in Pierre's plan of campaign, the swadir began to appear distinctly worthless. Yet, despite his disappointment, the artist found in the curious stranger that which still attracted him and invited confidences. His very abstraction, his search behind every fact for the elemental truth actuating that fact, lent authority to his opinions and his words. Impulsively Pierre determined to lay the whole situation before this mystic and, in the name of their common friendship for Philip, enlist his aid, if possible.

"Forgetting these generalities for a minute," he said, "there's something I want to tell you. Philip Brand and Laura Stratford love each other—"

"And you," the swadir interrupted, "fear that, in the absence of your

friend, another man will capture the woman. You want me to help you prevent this."

"Philip told you."

"No one told me."

"It's hard to believe, and yet I do believe you. It's weird. And the weirdest thing about it is that you seem so—so—" Pierre hesitated.

"Sane," the swadir prompted, and his deep laugh boomed through the apartment.

"I wasn't going to say 'sane.' I was going to say 'honest.' I know how the charlatans work these things out, but I could swear that the things you say are of your own discovery."

"They are, Mr. Pierre Dufresne—they are. Some day you, too, may understand the simple secrets of the occult. Meanwhile, let me assure you of this—and you can trust the statement as fully as you have everything else—Miss Laura Stratford will not be ensnared by Mr. Martin Hellman."

"You will help me prevent it?"

"I will prevent it. The woman interests me."

The last phrase was not to Pierre's liking. It was a curious thing to say, but it was said in the same dead-level, unenthusiastic tone as all the swadir's other observations. It might mean anything or nothing. The artist ended by attributing its mysterious suggestion to the swadir's friendship for Philip, and ended his visit with a feeling of distinct relief. He had found much more than he had hoped—not merely the ally he needed, but a man who had surprised him into a feeling of friendship.

And if, as he strolled home, certain disquieting thoughts flitted through his mind, having to do with the swadir's penchant for feminine beauty as vouched for by Philip's brief reference to his harem, Pierre merely smiled as he thought of what would happen to

the swadir if he so far forgot himself as to try to bring Laura under his spell.

"For after all," Pierre mused, "with all his attractiveness, he's a nigger."

From which it will be observed that while Pierre, sitting beside the swadir and smoking the same narghile, had been surprised into a friendly feeling, he had not abandoned his obsession, which was to protect Laura—not because of his friendship for her, he assured himself, but solely because of what he conceived to be his duty to Philip. He was convinced that Philip would return, sooner or later, and he wanted to see the romance brought to a successful conclusion. Removed from the potent influence of the swadir's personality, he was better able to consider that worthy calmly and to look for possible hidden motives. If his psychic powers were real—and Pierre was not one to deny the possibility—he might be dangerous in many ways. The painter decided to investigate cautiously whether or not the swadir might have happened upon facts pertaining to the return of the Stratfords, which he had so confidently predicted would take place in three days.

Telephoning to the Stratford home, after many attempts, he finally succeeded in getting on the wire the caretaker who had been left in charge, and was informed that no word had been received from Mrs. Stratford or her daughter as to the probable date of their arrival. Neither had any person inquired recently concerning the family. There was a similar lack of information as to Hellman's movements at his club and at the trust company through which he received his income. Santa Barbara was the last known address of all three. Pierre could find nothing upon which to base a prediction, yet, even so, the swadir might have been hazarding a guess. Even if his guess were wrong, he wouldn't worry over it, as being wrong was pos-

sibly one of the prerogatives of a swadir. On the other hand, if he happened to be right, it would give him a certain standing. As for his description of Philip's doings somewhere in Benares, that might all have been purest fake.

This was the twenty-seventh of December. One day passed, and on the twenty-ninth, Laura Stratford telephoned to Pierre to learn if he had finished the portrait he had started at Lenox. He told her it was ready for her inspection.

"I'll be right down," she said.

She came, smiling, radiant, vibrant with health and energy.

"Don't tell me how wonderful I'm looking!" she exclaimed gayly, as she entered the studio. "I can't stand any more of that."

"When did you arrive?" Pierre asked.

"Yesterday."

"You are at your own home?"

"No—at the Ritz. I hardly think we shall open the house this year. Our plans are rather indefinite."

"They say the hotels are all crowded. You must have had difficulty finding accommodations," Philip observed casually. "But I suppose you had reservations."

"No—just dropped in and took a chance."

"Nobody knew you were coming?"

"No. Why?"

"I called on the Swadir of Nakahal Thursday—"

"He is here!" Laura exclaimed, and Pierre thought he saw the flush of health on her cheeks deepen.

"He is very much here," Pierre went on. "He's a mysterious sort of person. He told me Thursday that you and your mother would be in New York in three days."

"Why three, I wonder," Laura mused. "We came the following day."

"He's psychic. Doesn't make any

boast about it. Rather takes it as a matter of course."

"How interesting! I should like to meet him."

"You will," Pierre assured her. "You'll get a note telling you when you may call."

He showed her his own imperative summons, and the portrait was forgotten while the painter told Laura of Philip's curious friend.

"You can't help liking him," Pierre said, adding as an afterthought, "even if he is a nigger."

"He's not a nigger," Laura replied with considerable warmth. "He's probably a very aristocratic Hindu."

"He's nearly black," Pierre insisted. "But come—we're forgetting the portrait. As an artist, I should be deeply aggrieved."

Laura studied the canvas critically, and approved it. She decided to leave it in Pierre's care for a time, as she did not want it taken to the hotel. They gossiped a few moments, and Laura departed. Pierre was anxious to learn Hellman's status, but she gave him no opening. Still, her carefree manner reassured him fully as much as did her immediate interest in the swadir, an interest which, Pierre assured himself, could be attributed only to the fact that Laura had been unable to put Philip Brand out of her mind.

CHAPTER VI.

Monday morning Pierre received another note from the swadir.

"The three days allotted having passed," he wrote, "and Miss Stratford having arrived, I should be glad to meet her without further delay. As I cannot be ignorant of the fact that for me to visit her at her hotel without first disguising myself in your ugly and uncomfortable fashion would attract much attention and might be embarrassing, I would suggest that you

invite us to your studio one day this week. You might include Mr. Martin Hellman also."

Beside what Pierre had come to expect of the swadir, this was astonishingly polite. His consideration for Laura was as pleasing as it was surprising. Also, the inclusion of Hellman in the party displayed a practical understanding of the situation that Pierre had not expected. By seeing him and Laura together, they could learn at first hand how matters stood. Then suddenly it occurred to Pierre that he had no knowledge of Hellman's return to New York. Was the swadir taking for granted that Hellman would be close upon the heels of the Stratfords, or had he positive information? By way of settling part of the problem, he telephoned to Hellman's club, and learned that he had arrived the previous day. Again the swadir was right. Pierre then communicated with Laura.

"An excellent idea," she said, when Pierre explained the plan. "What you told me about the swadir makes me just a little afraid of him. I shall be glad to be among friends."

"I thought of inviting Mr. Hellman, too," Pierre said.

"Oh, what for?" There was a touch of annoyance in Laura's tone.

"I thought he might like to see the portrait, as he was at Lenox when it was begun," Pierre explained, "but of course, if you object——"

"Not at all," Laura said quickly. "Let him come, by all means. I'll bring mother, too. We can make it a sort of unveiling affair."

"Good! Shall we say Wednesday, then?"

"Wednesday be it. Good-by."

Pierre soon located Hellman, who accepted with considerable enthusiasm the invitation to see the portrait.

"I might buy it myself," he said.

"But it is not for sale," Pierre replied. "It belongs to Miss Stratford."

"Oh, that's easily arranged," Hellman replied.

"I don't know about that," said Pierre. "Miss Stratford has already partly paid for it."

"I repeat, that's easily arranged," Hellman insisted. "Never mind asking questions. You'll understand soon enough."

Apparently the situation was not so simple as it had seemed. Either Hellman was taking a great deal for granted, or some sort of tentative understanding had been reached. In any event, Pierre considered his remarks of sufficient importance to report them in a note to the swadir, telling of his arrangements for the meeting.

Wednesday found Pierre as nervous as a bridegroom. Analyzing his perturbation, he called himself a meddling fool, a vulgar matchmaker. Laura was an intelligent woman, he told himself, old enough to know her own mind. Possibly she knew Hellman better than he did, and by what right did he assume that Philip would be a more desirable husband than the other man? He was displaying no evidences of such qualification.

Pierre had about decided to attempt no further interference, but to let nature take its course, when Laura, her mother, and Hellman all arrived together. Then, at the sight of the man, all his antipathy returned. Through the introductory commonplaces, Hellman subtly conveyed an impression of proprietorship, perhaps more in his attitude toward Mrs. Stratford than in anything else he said or did. Laura's mother accepted his solicitous attentions with a matter-of-course air, while Laura herself, in contrast to the vigor and breeziness of her manner on her previous call, was a little languid, and, so it seemed to Pierre, distinctly bored. The conspiracy was obvious. Between

them they were wearing Laura down until she would be unable to resist the temptation to rid herself of persecution by marrying the man. And once again he was glad he had the swadir as an ally, and glad that the swadir was a man of quick perceptions.

"Well, old man, trot out your picture," Hellman ordered at last.

"If you don't mind, I should like to wait for another guest," Pierre replied, appealing to Laura with a glance.

"You mean that Grand Mogul of What-you-call-it?"

"I mean the Swadir of Nakahal," Pierre answered stiffly.

"Yes, Laura told me about him," Hellman rattled on. "Friend of Phil Brand's, I understand. By the way, where is Phil now? Everybody's asking about him around the club."

"He was in Benares, the last I heard," Pierre replied.

"Always liked Phil," Hellman said patronizingly. "Fine chap. Does this swadir or whatever you call him bring any news of Brand's doings?"

"Nothing of importance," said Pierre, and turned away to look out across the Square. Then, as he espied an approaching vehicle, "Here comes the swadir now."

All three hurried to join the artist at the window. The day was cold, and the ground was covered with snow, but the swadir clung to his victoria. He was wrapped in a great sable cloak and presented a grotesque appearance, only his swarthy face, surmounted by the white turban, being visible above the fur. Several urchins, playing in the snow, stood and gazed at him, in doubt whether to line up along the curb for a procession or to pelt him hospitably with snowballs. Before they could decide, the victoria had drawn up in front of Pierre's studio, and the swadir, emerging from his cloak, had entered the building. Pierre opened the door and waited for him, nervous and flus-

tered. Before he could begin a formal introduction, the swadir strode to Laura and said:

"My greetings to Miss Laura Stratford."

He took her hand, bowed low over it, and raised it to his lips. Similarly he greeted her mother. Then, turning to Hellman with a slight inclination of his head:

"Mr. Martin Hellman."

The swadir himself was the only one of the five who was entirely at his ease. His garb was the same as that which he had worn when he arrived at the dock. It seemed to serve for all occasions, traveling, at home, and visiting. He was quite unconscious of the stares of the others, for even Pierre was examining him closely, surprised to note how tall he was, having previously seen him only in the soft light of his apartment, sitting cross-legged on the divan.

"I do not think I shall like your country," the swadir was saying. "It is strange that so large a portion of the human race voluntarily elected to migrate from the warm and kindly South. And, still unsatisfied, you are trying to find whether it be not possible to live at the north pole! So futile—so unnecessary!"

His voice, with its curious inflections and deep tones, like a humanized phonograph, filled the studio and gave fit expression to his dominating personality. Only the suggestion of human weakness conveyed by his heavy spectacles and by the slight hump on his back relieved the impression. Hellman felt himself dwarfed and was quick to rebel.

"If you believe in doing only the necessary things, why come to America?" he demanded, with a touch of belligerence in his voice.

"There are physical necessities, which you understand, and spiritual necessities, which perhaps you do not un-

derstand," the swadir replied calmly. "I am not here from physical necessity."

"I understand about spiritual necessities all right," Hellman retorted, with something approaching a sneer. "There was a baba or a swami or something of the sort here a year or two ago. The women fell for him strong. I understand he cleaned up enough to keep all India in rice for a generation."

"Ah, I was right," the swadir observed, in the same even tone as before.

"About New York?" Hellman asked.

"No, my friend, about yourself."

Hellman frowned, Mrs. Stratford looked questioningly at her daughter, who smothered a laugh, and Pierre hurried to intervene. This was too precipitate.

"We've been waiting for you to arrive before looking at a portrait of Miss Stratford which I painted last summer," he said and, drawing a large easel to the middle of the room, he removed the velvet draping that covered it.

"It's a very good likeness," Mrs. Stratford said almost immediately. "I think I should have liked it better, though, if Laura had been in an evening gown."

"Quite right," Hellman agreed. "That loose, summery thing doesn't do justice to her figure, do you think so, Dufresne?"

"Everybody has portraits painted in evening gowns," Laura protested.

"But not everybody looks as well as you in them," said Hellman. "Now there, for example," and he pointed to a picture on the wall, of a young woman in extreme décolleté.

Pierre looked at Laura and saw that she blushed.

"Art," the swadir began, ignoring the others, "should be spiritual, because the greatest beauty is spiritual. You see, I am a monomaniac. We Orientals

usually are. And so, it seems to me, Mr. Pierre Dufresne has done a very remarkable thing in approximating a spiritual portrait. He has shown that, in the very midst of nature's beauties, the beauty of this lady herself—not merely of her physical being, but of her inner qualities subtly expressed—is still supreme."

And now Pierre turned away to hide a blush. Recalling that he had chosen the setting for the portrait merely to get Laura away from Hellman, he felt a sense of guilt at the swadir's analysis. If he had done what the swadir said, it had been unconsciously, for he was not a great artist, after all.

They seemed to be waiting for him to come to the defence of his own work, but Laura saved him.

"This is very embarrassing!" she cried, in mock dismay. "Please don't discuss it any more. I like it, and it's mine, and there's nothing more to be said."

"Oh, I like it, too," Hellman hurried to interpose. "I want it. You will let me buy it, won't you, Laura?"

"No. You don't appreciate it," she replied, rather curtly.

"Besides," Pierre added, "if Miss Stratford relinquishes her claim, I shall insist that it go to the one who first suggested that it be painted—Philip Brand."

"No—I shall keep it," Laura insisted.

"If you should change your mind, I should like to have an opportunity to buy it," the swadir remarked.

"At least you do appreciate it," Laura admitted.

Throughout the discussion, Mrs. Stratford had sat off at one side of the studio, visibly annoyed. One foot softly tapped a nervous, though polite, disapproval. At Laura's last remark, she lost control of herself and blurted:

"I can't see why you don't let Martin have it, since it will be all in the family soon, anyhow."

"Mother!"

"Well—didn't——"

"Good afternoon, Mr.— I don't know just how one should address you," Laura said to the swadir, with an almost hysterical little laugh.

"Before I became swadir, I was, as nearly as English can make it, Mr. Haraj Kildaz."

"Then, Mr. Haraj Kildaz, good afternoon again. And—by the way—you may have the portrait," she added, with nervous impetuosity. "Good afternoon, Mr. Dufresne—Mr. Hellman. Mother, please hurry. We shall be late at Mrs. Grandison's tea."

Mrs. Stratford, without a word, followed her daughter, and Hellman followed Mrs. Stratford. Pierre closed the door behind them and went through the motions of giving three cheers.

"Great work!" he exclaimed to the swadir, who stood motionless before the portrait. "Lord, I had no idea things had gone so far! And if the old lady hadn't forgotten her good manners——"

"The result would have been the same eventually."

"But Hellman's goose is cooked now."

"Perhaps. It is unimportant. That was inevitable."

"You take it very calmly. But I've had this on my mind for months."

"I have more important things on my mind. The woman interests me."

Pierre stared at the still motionless swadir.

"Spiritually, of course," Pierre suggested.

"Oh, of course—spiritually."

CHAPTER VII.

The door of the limousine had hardly clicked before Laura turned upon her mother and Hellman furiously.

"I thought it was understood that I

promised I might some day marry Martin on the sole condition that it was to be kept secret among ourselves!" she said. "I wouldn't have gone even that far, only it seemed as if we ought to have some sort of sanction for his eternal following us about the hemisphere! Why, I haven't even so much as let him kiss me yet! I hadn't really made up my mind. Right now, I'm quite sure I'll never marry him."

"Now, Laura, be sensible," her mother coaxed. "I'm sorry it slipped out, but I didn't like the way that swadir was talking. He seemed to be getting too personal."

"Ridiculous! Everything he said was in the best of taste, which is more than I can say for Martin!" and Laura turned upon Hellman, who was making himself as small as possible in a corner of the seat. "You talked as if your idea of how you like me best is in a costume from the 'Follies' chorus!"

"Don't be indelicate," Mrs. Stratford protested. "I'm sure Martin meant nothing of the sort."

"Of course not," Martin assented weakly.

"Well, if he wasn't insulting, he was stupid, and that's worse! I might marry a brute, but I certainly will not marry a fool," and with this Laura leaned back and stared straight ahead, as if there was nothing to be added.

Mrs. Stratford was alarmed. It was the first sign of revolt on Laura's part through the entire campaign. She had followed her mother's generalship without question. To lose control of the situation with success so near would have been tragic to the dutiful parent, and Mrs. Stratford accused herself of having grown careless through seeing her plans work out too easily. So she humbled herself.

"Laura dear, I can't tell you how sorry I am it happened," she said. "It was very silly, but you must know how happy it makes me feel to think of

you as established, and it's very hard for me to keep it to my foolish old self. It would surely be unfair to punish Martin for my lapse."

Laura wriggled impatiently.

"You talk about marriage as if it were a business," she said. "After all, why should I marry any one?"

"Why, Laura, what has come over you? I never heard you talk like this before!" her mother exclaimed, aghast.

"Then I've been neglecting your education," Laura replied. Her outburst of anger having spent itself, she now felt quite gay. "Poor dear, I've been letting you get old-fogyish. But I shall do better in the future, and we'll make this the lesson for to-day—the modern woman doesn't marry by the calendar. You'll have to show me a better reason than my advanced years before I'll consent to make any man happy."

"I beg your pardon, Laura," Hellman ventured, "but am I to understand that our engagement is definitely broken?"

"You are, Martin, you are indeed! Your whole summer's work is ruined. Mind you, I don't say that you might not catch me again, but for the present I am out of the cage."

Hellman sank back against the cushions with a look so glum that Laura was divided between an impulse to shriek with laughter and another almost equally strong impulse to sympathize with him and reinstate him as her accepted swain. For he had been a faithful varlet, and Laura would have had to be either more or less than woman not to be touched a little by his earnestness. But even as this feeling of kindliness came to her, she held it in check. She knew that, if she allowed the engagement to Hellman to be continued after what had occurred, she never could face the swadir again.

This realization was a shock, for it entailed the admission that she not only

expected to develop her acquaintance with that mysterious stranger, but that she was virtually under compulsion to do so—by what power she could not understand. Just as Pierre had come under his spell and felt drawn to him as a friend, Laura experienced the same attraction. And instinctively she understood that friendship with the swadir was incompatible with friendship, or something closer than friendship, with Hellman. Their spontaneous antagonism forced her to this conclusion, an antagonism caused by the fact that they stood at the opposite poles of existence.

Yet why, as between the two men, she should feel herself swayed by the swadir and make no resistance, she could not explain to herself. It puzzled, but did not perturb her, though it was contrary to all her rules of conduct, conscious and intuitive. She asked herself directly if it was because he came from Philip, and was a little elated to discover that the thought of Philip left her unmoved.

Mrs. Stratford was not satisfied to let the victory go so easily to her daughter, and finally broke the silence, observing diplomatically:

"Of course, Laura dear, you were not serious in telling the swadir he might have your portrait. I realize that it was my fault. You will speak to Mr. Dufresne about it, won't you?"

"To tell the whole truth, I don't care what becomes of the portrait," Laura replied. "What difference does it make? It would be a kindness to Mr. Dufresne, for of course he'll make the swadir pay well for it. And it seems an absurd piece of vanity to have one's own portrait staring at one constantly."

"But imagine what people would say if they saw it in the home of this—well, the swadir then," Mrs. Stratford ended lamely, as she felt Laura stiffen slightly at the slur she had so nearly uttered.

"Nobody will see it," Laura assured her with a mischievous smile. "He'll undoubtedly take it to Nakahal and hang it in his harem to make his wives jealous."

"His harem!" Hellman and Mrs. Stratford exclaimed in unison.

"Of course," Laura laughed gayly. "Didn't I tell you? Philip wrote me last summer that the swadir had let him take a peep, and he saw the prettiest collection of wives you could imagine."

"Good heavens!" observed the horrified mother.

"And I will be a wife, too, by proxy, don't you see?" Laura went on merrily. She was getting her revenge and enjoying it.

This was too much for Mrs. Stratford.

"Laura," she said with epic dignity, "if you have no respect for yourself, at least I ask you to have some respect for your mother. If you don't mind, we will consider the subject closed."

Laura buried her face in her muff to conceal a giggle, for she loved her mother and did not want to cause her pain. She was satisfied to have carried the war into the camp of the enemy, and having emancipated herself from the half alliance with Hellman, into which she felt she had been tricked, she was content for the moment.

At the Grandisons' they sent Hellman gloomily upon his way, and, entering the house, Laura became automatically the very correct person her friends had always known, a model to which many a worried mother had directed the attention of a daughter who had developed symptoms of rebellion against the established order. But the swadir was still in her mind, and fortune had granted a propitious moment for her half-formed plans. About her she saw assembled the last word in social power, the court of last resort in which she herself was one of the jurists.

What was decided here was final. She dropped a word to Mrs. Grandison.

"There's a very great personage in New York," she said. "He's an Oriental monarch of unlimited wealth and the finest education—the Swadir of Nakahal."

"I have seen him driving," Mrs. Grandison said. "But nobody seems to know anything about him. Are you sure he isn't some low impostor?"

"I've met him, and he's quite charming," Laura assured her. "He has letters from Philip Brand."

"My dear, how interesting!" the hostess exclaimed.

Nothing stamped with the sign manual of the house of Brand could be incorrect. So the news was buzzed about that Laura Stratford had made the acquaintance of a king or an emperor or something of the sort, and that he was in New York. And every one wanted to meet him, since it appeared that his manners were irreproachable.

The buzzing reached Mrs. Stratford. Yes, she had met him, but while she could not openly declare that her daughter was recommending a person for whom she felt the strongest antipathy, she could be, and was, noncommittal. But the court of last resort had decided that it would accept the swadir upon the word of Philip Brand and Laura Stratford. Nay, more—various individual members of the court made it clear to Laura that it was her duty to introduce the swadir to society without delay. Thus urged, Laura consented to give a somewhat elaborate evening reception within a fortnight.

"That is," she added, "if mother has no objection."

To resist the general appeal would not have been in accordance with Mrs. Stratford's idea of the proprieties. It would reveal a family discord which must be kept secret. So the matter was settled.

"I suppose it's too late now, and perhaps it makes no difference to you," said Mrs. Stratford, as they drove away, "but I heartily disapprove of your taking up the swadir."

"Why, mother dear," Laura replied in her best manner, "why didn't you say so?"

Which goes to prove that the talent for generalship may be transmitted by heredity.

CHAPTER VIII.

Again Laura and Pierre received letters simultaneously from Philip. They were rambling records of a rambling existence, fugitive impressions of picturesque scenes, ancient temples, bands of pilgrims, jungle life, and the clash of Eastern and Western civilizations. Interwoven with his physical observations and experiences were flashes of philosophy in which a definite tendency toward mysticism was apparent.

"I am nearer to you to-day than you will ever know," he wrote to Laura, "unless, by some miracle of insight, you are enabled to pierce the veil of commonplace existence and recognize the ego which changes not. Once this secret is mastered, distance is annihilated. Without it, we may sit side by side and be as strangers."

Laura read and reread these baffling phrases. She remembered Pierre's description of the swadir's astral flight to Benares. It had none of the characteristics of psychic trances, being a projection at will to a previously determined individual. It was, possibly, only a supreme feat of telepathy. But Philip hinted at something supernatural. He had become immersed in the East, it appeared, and had lost himself completely. He made no reference to a possible return to the United States, or to any other plans for the future. He was simply drifting.

To Laura, the letter was an absolute farewell, and she experienced an

acute pang of regret at what she considered the utter waste. She did not believe that she would ever see Philip again, for she had read of men who became so steeped in Oriental life that they never could extricate themselves. Yet there was one hope—the swadir. If she could persuade him that, for Philip, the Orient was suicide, he might be able to effect a rescue even yet. It was curious how all her trains of thought these days carried her to the swadir.

Pierre's letter was similar, but there was a sardonic taunt in which Philip said:

"According to your prediction, by this time Laura Stratford and Martin Hellman are either married or well on the way. I will bet a lac of rupees you were wrong. The Swadir of Nakahal has, presumably, put in an appearance by this time, and if grave danger threatens any one in whom I am interested, please notify him. We have means of communication which I am sorry you have not learned to employ. Whenever he lets me know that my presence is necessary to the life, liberty, or happiness of any one in your circle of acquaintances, I will come to you on the wings of the morning. Until then, old friend, I remain in the Valley of the Lotus."

Removing Laura Stratford from the situation, there were certain phases of Philip's life that Pierre could understand and almost envy. He could visualize its beauty and feel its mental allurements. At its worst, it was higher ground than social dawdling. But he was an artist and a Latin, and as he turned to his portrait of Laura, which still remained in his studio, he could not comprehend how a man who, he believed, had only to speak to win the prize, could be so unappreciative.

Until the swadir had praised the portrait as a spiritual creation, Pierre had been so occupied with his motive in

painting it that he had not analyzed it closely. Unconsciously he had put into it the best work of his career. Previously, his easy facility in turning out portraits that, if superior to the average, were still quite conventional, had been an opiate to originality. Now he realized that he possessed a talent that he had hardly more than suspected, and with this realization his admiration for Laura, as its inspiration, was immeasurably increased. The swadir, with his disregard for appearances, had discerned at once the expression in the canvas of an individuality that, in the Laura of social amenities, was always repressed. A bold thought flashed. Pierre recalled his own dictum concerning the highest motive for matrimony.

"Philip appreciated her," he said to himself, "but has abandoned her. The swadir appreciates her possibly, but he is absurd—a nigger with a harem! Hellman doesn't appreciate her. I do. What if—"

Instantly he called himself an idiot, a crazy, beggarly painter—as absurd as the swadir. But when the swadir asked that the portrait be delivered, Pierre found various excuses. Certain finishing touches were needed—but he touched no brush to the canvas. It was not properly framed—but no framemaker was summoned. Laura might be out of his reach, but the portrait was in his possession, and it should so remain while his ingenuity endured.

Laura, meanwhile, was busy with the arrangements for the formal introduction of her lion, to which he had given his consent. The house had to be opened and countless decisions made, in none of which did she receive assistance from her mother. Being thus thrown upon her own resources, however, spurred instead of discouraging her. This little rebellion was exhilarating. She had tasted freedom and found its tang pleasant. It was only a small matter, to be sure—the breaking

of a near-engagement and the pursuit of a course that amounted almost to filial disobedience, though otherwise it was entirely proper—but assuredly it was rebellion. So the evening of the great event found Laura aglow.

It was not a large affair. One does not introduce a king to a mob, even a mob of social monarchs, and Laura supposed that the swadir was practically a king. She made a note to ask him about this definitely. She had hoped for an opportunity before the reception, having written him a note asking if he desired to approve her guest list. He replied formally that, even were he not a stranger in America, he knew he could add nothing to her authority. So she selected a mere twoscore, the ultimate expression of New York aristocracy.

The swadir arrived at a decorous hour, accompanied by Pierre. The artist, being one of the two New York friends of the potentate, had automatically achieved an exalted position to which he never could have aspired as a painter, even if he had had aspirations. It was known that the distinguished visitor had even gone to his studio and received him at his apartment, the only person so honored thus far. No one else had seen the place, and since the customary source of information through backstairs wireless was blocked, the swadir's servants being Hindus, gossip glorified the establishment into something between the hanging gardens of Babylon and a monastic cell. Less because he was a king than because of the myths that had grown up around him, and because he sought none, but required others to seek him, did democracy's aristocracy titillate.

He was an accommodating and well-behaved lion—nothing out of the ordinary except in his appearance and his speech. He introduced neatly. He met effusiveness with dignity and dig-

nity with inoffensive condescension. With his unerring sixth sense, he found invariably the right word for every one. In short, he was pleasing, but no sensation. Laura was a little disappointed and was vaguely conscious that she had hoped for something exciting. Just when she had reconciled herself to an entirely conventional evening, the swadir became strangely silent in the midst of a little group of votaries. He peered this way and that, searchingly.

"There is some one here I have not met—here or soon to arrive," he said hesitatingly. "I have seen him before. I think of him with camels."

"Camels! How strange!" gushed little Mrs. Blenhasset. "Laura dear, are you expecting any one with camels?"

"Certainly not. How absurd!" Laura replied, joining the little circle.

"An American traveler with a camel train," the swadir persisted. "Is there not a man here who has traveled with a camel train through Nakahal?"

"Why, it must be Doctor Pitterby!" Laura exclaimed. "He said he would be here. I didn't know you had met."

"Doctor Pitterby?" the swadir repeated. "The name is unfamiliar. Perhaps I was wrong. It is unimportant."

But the word was circulated buzzingly. The swadir had second sight. He felt the approach of Doctor Pitterby, though he could not remember ever having met that noted savant and explorer, the distinguished author of "Asia, the Core of the World." Questioned further, he regretted to confess that he never had heard of the book, which had had a great vogue in America because the doctor was a Pitterby of The Pitterbys. That the owner of the Pitterby billions should write any book at all was enough to get the book read, and a freshwater college had presented him with a document that made him an LL.D., though why Asiatic exploration should entitle a man to a doctorship of laws was not explained.

in the parchment. The college received its *quid pro quo*, however, and Pitterby had the "LL. D." on his cards. Nobody took his explorations very seriously, a fact that secretly gave him great pain, for he was a sincere soul, in spite of his handicap of wealth and lineage, and he wanted to leave the world something more than money. The difficulty was that this did not occur to him until he had passed middle age.

While this minor display of the psychic power was still being discussed, the learned gentleman arrived, and was informed breathlessly, by half a dozen friends at once, of what had occurred. He was more astonished than they, and was swiftly led before the lion.

"Ah, Doctor Pitterby, now I see clearly," said the swadir. "You traveled by caravan through Nakahal—Was it ten years ago?"

"I made the overland journey from Teheran to Ahmadabad, but I do not recall—"

"No—that is true. We are a small and obscure people, and our one city of importance is far from the usual road. But one day, while hunting, I saw your party far across the ravine. I watched you quite a while through my field glasses, but you were more than two miles away, and I could not reach you. It was where the road follows a deep cleft in the mountains, between Istrahal and Lhaknev. You passed through Istrahal, of course?"

The doctor lied. His book had been read—yes. He was a doctor of laws—yes. Still, among his intimates, he was not taken seriously as an explorer. In the company of his equals, he might have been more cautious, but here, for the first time, was his opportunity to bask in the "light which beats upon a throne," and he could not resist.

"Oh, ya-as, ya-as," he said, nodding vigorously and losing his spectacles in the excitement. After all, what did it

matter? Istrahal, he believed, was somewhere between Kerman and Quetta, and in Persia, India, Afghanistan, or else Baluchistan. It was doubtless one of those insignificant villages, consisting of a tent and a well, which one passed without noticing. He would look up his notes when he returned home. You can't expect an explorer, even an LL. D. explorer, to carry everything in his head.

"Then you were in Nakahal," the swadir boomed, for all the world to hear.

"Was I?" Pitterby, the savant, exclaimed. "I'm sorry I did not know. In the next edition of my book—"

"You could not have known unless you had inquired, and how could you inquire when you did not know?" the swadir laughed. "But you shall come to Nakahal again, and you will find plenty of material for another book. Our country has resources of which the world should be advised."

"It is a wealthy country?"

Wealthy in such wise as you and I, my friend, can appreciate. Come to see me some time soon. It is pleasant to meet one who recalls the lovely valleys of Nakahal," and the swadir turned away as a hint that the special audience was ended.

"Oh, do tell us more about Nakahal," pleaded little Mrs. Blenhasset.

"What should you care about kingdoms of the East, you who have a beautiful kingdom of your own?" he replied.

"A kingdom of my own?" she repeated wonderingly.

"Your home, your husband, your children," the swadir explained.

This was a bit intimate, and, with perfect *savoir-faire*, those near them discreetly moved away a little and asked one another how the swadir came to know so much about the Blenhassets. And how much more did he know? Had he heard how the silly little woman

was getting herself talked about, because last year, and again this year, she had permitted the somewhat obvious attentions of an opera singer? How could he have heard these almost inaudible whispers, when he had seen no one but Laura Stratford and Pierre Dufresne, who were never known to gossip?

"A kingdom is a great thing to own, a terrible thing to lose," Laura heard the swadir say to the little blushing woman, as she passed them.

Whatever else he said, Mrs. Blenhasset did no more gushing, and soon went home. Two little curly heads that night protested feebly at being snatched from slumber to be hugged and kissed almost fiercely, and sleepily wondered at this strange action of their pretty mamma. The good advice of her sincerest friends had been wasted upon Mrs. Blenhasset, but the warning of the mystic had provided the shock necessary to awaken her inner consciousness.

Laura's triumph was complete. The mere fact that the swadir deftly refused to talk about himself placed him upon a plane far removed from the mystics of commerce, and his mysticism made him something more than an ordinary potentate. Laura and Pierre were besieged with questions which they could not answer, and the guest was showered with invitations, excusing himself from those which he declined in a manner so ingratiating that no one was offended. He had contributed a new thrill, an inexhaustible topic of conversation, and society was grateful.

"Isn't he wonderful?" Laura demanded of Hellman, who was holding himself aloof, with an expression of ill-concealed scorn.

"Oh, very!" he replied ironically. "Too bad somebody hasn't lost a necklace for him to find! I believe they do these things very reasonably."

Laura stabbed him with a glance and turned away. If he had taken his defeat with better grace, she could have retained a kindly feeling for him, but his open antagonism toward the swadir betrayed him and made him an exile.

The evening sped swiftly on the wings of excitement, and toward midnight the lion departed.

"I must see you again soon," Laura said, as he was leaving. "I want you to do something for me. It's about Philip—Mr. Brand. I am worried—We're quite old friends, you know."

"I shall come soon," he replied, "and we will speak of Mr. Philip Brand—yes, of Mr. Philip Brand, by all means," and he smiled curiously as he bowed low over her hand.

CHAPTER IX.

There is a story of a man who owned a very small tobacco store at the far end of which was a cigar lighter. Every day, at about the same time, a big, unmannerly man would come in, elbow his way past any customers who happened to be in the little shop, light a disreputable pipe at the cigar lighter, and elbow his way out again. Finally, this visitor producing no revenue, the owner of the shop protested.

"You don't know who I am," the boor replied, and went out. And he was right, too.

But the tobacconist protested again the next day, and again the man with the pipe retorted:

"You don't know who I am."

The next day it occurred to the owner of the shop to ask him who he was.

"I'm the guy that comes in here every day to light his pipe," the man replied. So after that, the tobacconist, knowing who the man was, made no further objection to his intrusion.

New York now knew who the swadir was, so he could go anywhere with

almost no comment. Whatever his designs, at least they were not commercial. Apparently he was just seeing America. He saw a good deal of it in the next few weeks. He saw plays, movies, flashy cafés, hide-away restaurants, the Metropolitan Museum, the Diamond Horseshoe, the Pennsylvania Station, the Palisades, Wall Street, Greenwich Village, and many other national institutions.

He took it all quite seriously, almost like a man about to commit a book. For example, when it was explained to him quite painstakingly that the strange carved beasts on the pedestals in front of the public library were lions, modeled after the jungle monarchs he had so often hunted, he found therein a text for a discourse on the fantastic symbolism of native American art. Thus he tossed off carelessly plenty of material for the founding of various new cults in art and religion, but founded none.

This extension of his social existence enabled Laura to see him frequently without exciting comment. And the more she saw him, the more she wanted to see him. He called on her, as he had promised, to discuss the fate of Philip Brand, but, as always, he confined his remarks to the fundamentals of life and not mere incidents. Laura persisted.

"But don't you see," she said earnestly, "that a man like Philip, with generations of men of action behind him, cannot adapt himself to the sort of life he is leading? It's like a drug to him. Surely you can make him understand this."

"How can you know whether it is for another's good or your own desires that you speak, when you wish to change another's form of life?" he asked.

"I am not—interested—in Mr. Brand," she said, hesitating a little, and adding, "any longer."

"Not interested? And yet you would rearrange his life for him!"

"For his own good, don't you understand?"

"We live closer to ourselves than we do to any other person. But do we always understand our own actions, or even our own motives? Do we not often make mistakes? How, then, shall we dare to impose our will upon others, and pretend that it is for their good? Rather is it our egotism that prompts us. It is a dangerous course, dear lady. For me, to rule my own life is all the responsibility I dare assume."

"But he is accomplishing nothing."

"Ah, now we have it! You would have him, perhaps, write a book, like our friend, Doctor Pitterby? At least he would not overlook Nakahal."

"I don't care what he does, but he should be among his own people."

"He is among his own people, and his own people have made him welcome," the swadir declared. "I can assure you that he is happy. What more could you wish for him?"

"He has no—regrets?"

"Regret is the staggering of a little soul, drunken with self-pity. Philip's soul is not little. He has found the universal."

Laura's imagination was stimulated by this positive view of life. When she tested her own round of days, her constant movement almost independent of thought, by the virility of the swadir's mental conceptions of what life should mean, she had an uneasy feeling that it was she, rather than Philip, who needed rescuing.

"I don't quite understand what you mean by 'finding the universal,'" she said.

"Naturally. There are many steps to be taken first," the swadir replied.

"And what is the first?"

"Discover your greatest prejudice—and overcome it."

He left her with this food for cogi-

tation. She watched him drive away, his swarthy, spectacled face peering out between the top of the sable cloak and the bottom of his turban—as queer and unhandsome an apparition as one could imagine. She wondered why she was not amused at his appearance, and at once understood that it was because not merely his philosophy, but his personality, was so fine that it made appearances of no consequence. For the first time, she understood how a woman of delicate instincts might love a man whose body was crooked and deformed.

These things were much in her mind as the weeks sped along and she saw the swadir from time to time, now in large gatherings and now *tête-à-tête*. But it was not until the evening when the swadir rewarded his friends for their hospitality by entertaining them in his apartment that she fully realized how completely she had come under his influence.

The guest list was the same that Laura had compiled so carefully for her own reception, and every one came. Murmuringly they circulated through the rooms, with little attempt to conceal their astonishment at the novel display of splendor. A faint odor of dead rose leaves permeated the atmosphere and completed the illusion of a world far removed from everyday New York. From an alcove curtained with palms floated the long, passionate phrases of Oriental melodies in the oboelike tones of the zourna, punctuated occasionally by the soft beating of a daraboukkkeh. The music was so quiet and unpretentious that it never intruded upon the conversation, but its quivering tones made the senses throb strangely, even when it was barely heard. A spell was cast over the assemblage that hushed the chattering as the guests inspected the treasures.

The swadir moved among them, seemingly taller and more imposing than ever. He remembered the names

of all, and had an appropriate word for each.

"You have decided to remain a queen," he said to Mrs. Blenhasset, so quietly that no one else could hear, as the little woman looked up at him with mingled awe and gratitude.

It was as if he had taken them captive and imprisoned them in a palace, where they were all at his mercy, and a terrible jinni might have popped out of one of the antique vases without occasioning great astonishment. Laura responded to the pervasive sensuousness like a vibrant violin, and felt herself carried away into unexplored realms of sensation. Hellman kept close to her, and rebelled against her mood until his rising anger made him desperate.

"Great layout you've got here," he blurted out at last, to the swadir, from halfway across the room. "Is your harem anything like this?"

A silence fell suddenly upon the company. The plaintive notes of the zourna trembled with apprehension. Somewhere a woman laughed a little hysterically, but quickly recovered herself. Laura clenched her fists until the nails bit into the flesh and hurt her.

"Much more beautiful," the swadir replied. His voice was as calm and even as if he were speaking of a mountain vista. "It is permanent. This is merely a traveler's expedient."

"You—you have—a—a harem?" stammered Georgina Delaney, emboldened by the fact that Hellman had not been whisked away in a spurt of flame, and anxious to be certain that she had heard the terrible thing correctly.

"It is the custom of my country," the swadir assured her.

"But you seem so civilized!" Miss Delaney observed explosively.

The swadir laughed.

"Whatever else it may be, at least

the harem is honest," Laura said impulsively.

"Why, Laura!" Georgina exclaimed in obvious horror.

"Oh, what's the use of being hypocritical about it?" Laura replied. "We all know that most American men envy the Orientals their legalized institution."

"I don't believe it, and I think it's perfectly horrid to talk like that!" declared Mrs. Barrington hotly, and looked up at her husband with adoration.

There was a general laugh. The Barringtons had been married three months.

"Of course you must appreciate that I am speaking only of the lower classes," Laura explained dryly. "We all know quite well that what I have said couldn't possibly apply to the sort of person one knows."

"Perhaps you do not understand how the harem became in the Orient, unfortunately, a necessity," the swadir said. "I do not defend it, but if you would be interested in the explanation—"

A subdued chorus urged him to go on.

"Practically all the religions of Asia," he began, "deny that women have souls. That is the fundamental reason why all of them have decayed in spirit, and why the East has stood still all these centuries. There has been no real companionship between men and women, and so there has been no real love, and hence no social progress. But the man of the East is a thinker and, sounding the depths of his own nature, he has found therein the ceaseless longing for love. You can hear that longing, perhaps, in our melodies. We know there is such a thing in the universe, but blindly we have put it beyond our reach by preventing women from becoming our mental equals.

"So, in his search for love, the man

finds one woman who appeals to one element in his nature—his sense of beauty, let us say—and he takes her for his wife. But this woman's beauty is her sole possession, and she does not satisfy him. He finds another woman who charms him with her feeling for music, another who is versed in the art of decorating, and so on. The man is many-sided, the women are almost invariably one-sided. So, to meet his need, the man takes several wives who, among them, possess the qualities that the man in this country can, without much searching, find combined in one woman. Tradition has accustomed the women of the Orient to the idea of being possessed without possessing. It is unjust, but entirely natural. I do not defend—I only explain."

"True, very true," Doctor Pitterby hastened to declare. "The Oriental women I have met are only toys. No brains—no initiative."

"But aren't you afraid of being arrested for bigamy?" demanded Miss Delaney, determined to carry her investigation to its logical conclusion.

"I am in no danger so long as I keep my wives in Nakahal," the swadir explained with a smile. "The United States is very tolerant of what you do, so long as you don't do it in the United States. For example," and he looked quizzically at his questioner, "if I were to marry an American girl while I am still in New York, it would be criminal, but if she consented to accompany me to Nakahal, she could enter my harem without fear of molestation by your laws."

Georgina gasped and hid behind a little group of friends, as if she feared the swadir contemplated snatching her up and carrying her off without more ado. Her involuntary action was so obvious that every one laughed, and the spell was broken. The subdued murmur was resumed, but a sensation

had been furnished which made the tapestries and ivories of insignificant interest. No one was especially shocked. It was a matter of common knowledge that swadirs and such had harems, but it was the first time any of those present had heard the subject discussed by an authority, and it was deliciously thrilling. It was one thing to read about harems, and quite another to be in the same room with the owner of one in active operation, and he such a gentleman. It produced the same shivery feeling that might be occasioned by entering the cage of a boa constrictor, guaranteed benevolent and altruistic.

"Did you ever see such infernal cheek?" Hellman demanded of Laura, inwardly congratulating himself upon the thorough manner in which the swadir had been smoked out. To him a harem was the last word in sensuality, and, knowing something of Laura's fastidiousness, it seemed to him that she would not be able to tolerate this open flaunting of polygamy.

Laura ignored the remark and turned to him with a disarming smile.

"I believe I am becoming psychic myself," she said. "I'll bet a box of gloves I can tell you what half the men here are thinking."

"It's a good sporting proposition," Hellman replied. "I'll take you. What is it?"

"That it's a beastly shame Nakahal is not within commuting distance. But never mind paying the bet. It wouldn't be fair, on a sure thing."

With crimson banners on both cheeks, she left him. She wanted to be alone, to think. She was glad that her mother, hesitating between curiosity and pride, had finally shown herself a really remarkable woman and stayed at home. Laura had felt all eyes turned upon her in astonishment when she had rushed to the defense of the harem on

the ground of its honesty. The remark had been spontaneous and almost involuntary, forced from her by a feeling that, whatever the swadir's mode of life might be, innately he was far superior in his viewpoint to this throng of little men and women, and that to be in agreement with him would place her with a safe majority, in spirit if not in numbers. Yet there was all the force of tradition to bring her course into question. She despised sensationism, and while she was not condemned in her own mind, she understood in what light she must appear to her friends. Swiftly and inevitably she was reaching the point where she must decide irrevocably what was the important thing—to be herself or to conform. This much the swadir had done for her—first, through indirectly causing her to break with Hellman; then, because of that, to ignore her mother's wishes; and now to take a stand at open variance with society's unwritten laws of what a nice girl should say. She was reaching a point of splendid isolation, and found the splendor ample recompense for the isolation.

She strolled into one of the smaller rooms, where Pierre Dufresne followed her, leading her into a cushioned nook.

"There's something I've been wanting to say for a long time," he said, "but however I say it, it's going to seem impertinent."

"Well, now that I know the worst, what is it?" Laura asked with a reassuring smile.

"It seems to me you ought to be on your guard against the swadir. I know that sounds queer," he hurried on, "but it's just because I can't define what I mean that I feel I ought to say it."

"I thought you liked him."

"I do, but he's a man's man. Don't you sense something almost hypnotic about him? He gives me shivers, and I'm not easily affected. That sort of

thing doesn't hurt a man as it does a woman."

"On the contrary, I am never so much myself as when I am with him," Laura replied. "I think it's the mystery that makes you feel as you do. I never think of the mystery, but only of the individual."

"It isn't the mystery," Pierre insisted, "and it isn't his mental qualities, but just the power of his personality. I should think he would be very dangerous to women, especially sensitive ones."

"There's no danger for me half so great as one he helped me escape," Laura mused. "I'm grateful to him because he makes me think. And besides," she added with a smile, "as you have pointed out, he's a nigger with a harem. Oh!" The exclamation was attenuated.

"What's the matter?" Pierre asked, half alarmed.

"Why—nothing. I had almost forgotten—I promised mother I'd be home early. I must go."

Almost precipitately, Laura bade the host good night, but, once in her car, she ordered the chauffeur to drive slowly around the Park. Closing her eyes, she leaned back in the seat.

Her exclamation had been caused by the sudden realization that, unconsciously, she had taken what the swadir had called the first step toward "finding the universal." She had overcome her two strongest prejudices. Her greatest antipathy had always been for black-skinned men, and scarcely second to this had been her feeling against polygamy, open or secret. Yet she had publicly rushed to something very like a defense of the swarthy, polygamous swadir. It was spitting hairs to argue that he was a Hindu, not a negro; the fact remained that he was of another race, another color, another social order. Yet she had accepted him as her friend. She pondered and puzzled, but

she could not get beyond the fact to its explanation, so she went home.

But before she slept, she had reached a clear understanding that her state of mind had nothing to do with any such abstruse process as "finding the universal." She knew that she had not overcome her antipathy for black men and polygamists, but that the swadir was an exception. Perhaps Pierre's warning had been justified. She would be more guarded. But she slept peacefully.

CHAPTER X.

Sam Crosby, of the *Dispatch*, and one Scotch highball, occupying the same suit of clothes and on the friendliest possible terms with each other, ascended to the swadir's apartment by permission a few days later. Sam looked well and felt better. He had an assignment that was exactly to his liking. The highball had been a last-minute inspiration, and Sam congratulated himself upon having thought of it. Ordinarily he did not employ alcoholic aid, but for this once he believed that his acute perceptions needed an extra edge.

The big boss had said: "See this freak that calls himself the Swadir of Nakahal and show him up."

After his first public appearance, the swadir had consented to talk to a few newspaper men and women. He had said nothing in a manner so picturesque that it was ideal "woman's-page stuff." So when Sam Crosby sent up his card, the swadir had no reason to suspect that there was anything more afoot than a scheme to fill a column or two of dull-day space.

Sam prided himself upon his adaptability to any circumstances, but after gravely considering the swadir's cross-legged posture on a divan, and the proffered mouthpiece of a narghile, he begged to be excused and, seating himself in a big chair, lighted a cigarette

from his own case. He wanted to be under no obligations to his victim. He was a suave youth, and he went about his business in a leisurely manner. He would have made a popular executioner, always making the way smooth and easy, leading to a *coup de grâce* almost painless because entirely unexpected. So he asked the swadir in an offhand manner what he thought of America—American politics, American men, American women, American food. He sought comparisons with other countries—with England, India, Nakahal. The swadir accommodated him without appearing bored.

"By the way, where is Nakahal?" Crosby asked, almost indifferently, as he lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Do you know where Swat is?" the swadir asked in reply.

"Are you kidding me?" the reporter asked quickly.

"Kidding?"

"Swat is one of those joke towns, like Zenda and Graustark, isn't it?"

The swadir laughed.

"I had been informed," he said, "that Americans learned their Asiatic geography from the poetry of Mr. Rudyard Kipling, but I never really believed it until now. Does Swat, then, exist for Americans only in a bit of nonsensical verse?"

"Do you mean that Swat is a regular town, on the map and everything?"

"It is not a town; it is a state, and I believe the British army records will locate it definitely for you."

"Then Nakahal is near Swat?"

"I came through Swat on my way to America."

"What direction is Nakahal from Swat?" Sam was annoyed at being caught unprepared and assumed a courtroom manner.

"North or northwest—perhaps a little more west than north."

If Sam had not been so annoyed, and perhaps so self-confident, or if the

highball had still been functioning, he might have noticed a trace of irritation in that calm, deep voice. But he was treeing his game, and he snapped out: "How far?"

"Let us pause a moment, Mr. Samuel Crosby, to define a little more clearly the purpose of this conversation," the swadir suggested. "Am I to understand that you are seeking information, or that you are endeavoring to assure yourself that I will be able to find my way back to Nakahal? In the former instance, I refer you to your very excellent public library, and in the latter, to my valet."

The hunt was up.

"Look here and listen, Mr. Swadir," Sam replied, smoothly and incisively. "I don't know what your game is, but whatever it is, it's done for. I've been to the public library and to the British vice-consulate and to the Oriental departments of three universities, and I know as well as you that there's no such place as Nakahal and no such person as a swadir."

"So with one word you wipe me out of existence. You are ruthless, Mr. Samuel Crosby."

"And that's all you've got to say, is it?" and the reporter rose to go. "I may as well tell you that if you can describe the whereabouts of your throne by metes and bounds, this is the time to do it."

"You interest me. I assume you propose an exposure. That also interests me. Have you, then, discovered my swindling operations?"

"You haven't started yet, and the *Dispatch* is going to see that you don't get a chance."

"Then your theory, Mr. Samuel Crosby, is that, as you can't understand why any one should visit your country for pleasure or enlightenment, I must be dishonest. A fair deduction, indeed, but not very complimentary to America."

"That stuff gets you nowhere with me. I'm looking for facts."

"Then sit down, my friend, and I will give you some," the swadir replied, and Sam sat. "The first fact is that this task upon which you are engaged did not come to you in the customary way from your immediate superior. It was specially allotted to you by Mr. Caldwell Brixton, your chief executive. The next fact is that Mr. Caldwell Brixton also did not act upon his own initiative, but received his inspiration from Mr. Martin Hellman, who owns a very large interest in your journal."

"For a foreigner, you seem to know a lot about New York newspapers, but there's nothing occult about that," Sam observed.

"Neither was there anything occult in the manner in which I became possessed of the third set of facts. You understand, perhaps, that no matter what powers one may happen to possess, when one is acquiring data to be passed on to purely material mentalities, one utilizes the same methods as you yourself might use. Upon several occasions, Mr. Martin Hellman has displayed rancorous and unprovoked enmity toward me, for reasons I cannot fathom. To learn more about the man, and what his motives might be, I took steps to obtain a great deal of information about him. The third set of facts to which I have just referred would be of no interest to the *Dispatch*, and so I will not go further than to say that they would make extremely interesting reading in some newspaper not inclined to be friendly toward Mr. Martin Hellman. I am informed that there are such newspapers in New York. Now of course this has little or nothing to do with the geography of Nakahal, and yet——"

"So you've got the goods on Uncle Marty! Well, I'll say that, for a stranger in our midst, you're quite an active citizen! And the idea is that you'll

be nice about it if we'll be nice about you?"

"What you do, or do not do, is of no interest to me whatsoever. I merely wanted to make it plain to you that I know the source of your instructions and some intimate facts about that source."

"In other words," insisted the literal reporter, "you know when you have the drop on us. And though a lot of people have been after what you've apparently dug up, nobody has been able to land it. Sa-ay! Now I never sold out a sheet I was working for in my life," Crosby said eagerly, "but if I should happen to resign from the *Dispatch* and go to work on the *Signal*, could I get some of that dope on Hellman? I never did like that guy."

"I am the Swadir of Nakahal, not a peddler of scandal," the potentate answered proudly.

"Looks to me as if you're bullet proof," Crosby admitted ruefully.

"By the way," the swadir called out, as Sam was halfway to the door, "if you really do want to know where Nakahal is, you might see Doctor Pitterby. He's been there and has maps, I believe—at least of the region about Is-trahal."

"Hell! Why didn't you say so at first?" Crosby growled.

"You amused me, with your curious idea that I should establish myself here—rather elaborately, to say the least, either for commercial or social purposes—and then be so stupid as to assume the name of a nonexistent ruler, when I venture to say there is not a spot on the globe that has not been visited by some Pitterby, now to be found right here in your city to corroborate or deny. Good afternoon."

And Samuel Crosby, descending to the street, was no longer conscious of a joint occupant of his neat-fitting suit. He tingled with other, less pleasant stimulant.

"Better lay off that guy," he advised Brixton. "He's fulla dynamite." And he told of the interview.

"You telephoned to Pitterby, of course?"

"Of course. Pitterby says the swadir is o. k., and the next edition of his book will show the location of Nakahal, in a general way. He knows exactly where it is."

Brixton saw Hellman, and they decided that Crosby was right about the explosive nature of the swadir, so they decided to "lay off," even as the reporter advised.

CHAPTER XI.

If Laura's determination to be on her guard against the swadir was sincere, it was soon apparent that she proposed to give herself plenty of opportunity for exercising that vigilance. They went about together constantly, the very openness of their association disarming gossip. Besides, they discovered that their inclinations led them to places which, though anything but secluded, were not the favored gathering spots of the elect. In the Metropolitan Museum they succeeded in discovering a few masterpieces to which they returned again and again. The hour when tea and cocktails were prevalent among their intimates frequently found them strolling across Brooklyn Bridge, marveling at the miracle of Manhattan's electrical towers. From the deserted, windswept Palisades, they looked across the river at the fourteen miles of solid masonry that constituted the framework of the world's greatest city, and watched it change like a hacked opal with every shifting cloud. They did not hunt out these spots to avoid being seen together, but because, in the development of their friendship, they discovered a mutual love of beauty in its larger aspects, which was not satisfied with less than the "far-seeing places."

Only Laura's mother was fully aware of the extent to which the association had developed. She pleaded and scolded by turns, but was disarmed by her daughter's sphinxlike smile.

"The man interests me," Laura said simply, echoing unconsciously the swadir's own remark. "He'll be going back to his own country soon, and I'm going to enjoy his wisdom while the opportunity lasts."

All that saved Mrs. Stratford from nervous prostration was Laura's manifest happiness. So long as she could laugh and sing, she was safe, and she never had been so buoyant. For she was content. She "asked no question and made no prayer," satisfied with the glow of the passing days.

Then, one night, they heard "Tristan and Isolde" together, and alone.

They went on the spur of the moment, with no time to organize a party. They had not even time to dress, and sat far back in the Stratford box in the bend of the Horseshoe. It has been said that no woman should be held accountable for her actions for twenty-four hours after listening to this greatest of love operas.

Laura had heard the opera a dozen times and was familiar with every mood of the ceaseless flow of melodic passion. It had stirred her deeply when she had heard it with Philip, but this night it sent her imagination winging in strange and daring flights. The figures of the drama were alive with new meanings. *King Marke* represented her conventional world, a world to which she had been betrothed without her consent. Against that alliance, like *Isolde*, she rebelled. And was the swadir *Tristan*? If she could be certain, she would count it no sin, no betrayal, to take ship and follow him across the seas, for he was going away soon, he had told her.

Was he going grievously wounded, as *Tristan* went? He himself could

not, would not speak—of that she was convinced; his sense of honor would place a seal upon his emotions, however strong they might be. How could she know? Every fiber of her being was tense as she drank in the love duet, and she fairly gasped as the lovers kissed.

The act swept to its close, and the fall of the curtain saved her from fainting. She reeled, and the theater and the lights swam before her eyes, not with the giddiness of nausea, but with the exaltation of an eagle, long captive, beating its wings against the stars. Through the intermission, they were silent, and Laura dared not turn to look at her companion. She dreaded the ordeal of the last act, and steeled herself against its ecstasy.

The music began again. The curtain rose. *Tristan* lay wounded and delirious, calling incoherently for *Isolde*. The mournful notes of the shepherd's pipe told the dying man that she had not yet come. Laura remembered the swadir's words, "You can hear that longing, perhaps, in our melodies." *Isolde* came, and Laura clutched at her heart at the immediate tragedy of *Tristan's* death. A moment, and the most glorious soprano voice in the world was soaring with utter self-abandonment in the triumphant "Love Death" music. Laura listened a moment, swayed in her chair, pressed her clenched hands to her temples, and gasped:

"Come! Take me away—please!"

Fortunately the foyer was empty, and there was no one to comment upon the fact that Laura Stratford leaned heavily upon the arm of the Swadir of Nakahal as they descended the stairs and went to the carriage exit. Her limousine was called.

"You would like to drive for a while?" the swadir asked, and he helped Laura into the car.

She nodded feebly. He spoke to the chauffeur and sat beside her.

Unconscious of the noisy night traffic, neither spoke as the car glided this way and that to the Avenue, out to the Park, through the deep shadows of the driveways, and across to the river. Laura started tugging at her gloves and in a moment reached out a hot, bare hand. The swadir clasped it in his, and they gripped until their fingers ached with joy. Still they immersed themselves in tremulous silence. For Laura, there was neither past nor future, time nor circumstance, but only this man and now.

"Say something to me, Haraj," she whispered at last.

The swadir trembled. She had heard the name only once, months before, and had not forgotten.

"Laura—I hardly dare believe what I know is true," he murmured. "The dangerous magic of the music, perhaps— Are you quite certain you know what you are doing?"

"I understand what you mean. You want me to be sure—to know, not merely feel. I do know. Back there in the theater, I was almost mad. It was revelation—the mountain peak where the air is too rare for breathing. But now I am myself again, and the vision remains. If you want me—"

"Laura!" He gripped her hand still tighter, and her heart leaped at the sharp pain of it. "It is a miracle of courage you perform."

They were silent again a little while.

"Haraj!"

"Yes, my beloved!"

"You said one woman might have all a man needed," she faltered.

"You shall be my only wife," he said firmly.

"But those others——"

"In Nakahal, I am swadir. My word is ultimate law. They shall be divorced and well cared for."

"I can't help being a little sorry for them."

"They will not be unhappy. They do not know what love is."

"That is why I am a little sorry for them," she breathed.

Again the potent silence.

"Haraj!"

"Yes, my beloved!"

"Tell me—tell me!"

"Laura, I love you!"

"I love you, Haraj."

"It is for this I came across the world."

"And it is for this I have waited—waited for you."

They turned toward each other, their faces dimly outlined in the darkness. They drew closer, and saw the light in each other's eyes. Laura's lips were parted, and her breath was coming quickly. She felt the man tremble as he turned away slowly.

"Not until you come to me," he said, and it was as if he tore every word out of his heart.

"Haraj—you are hurting my hand—a little," she whispered.

He relaxed his hold and lifted the little hand to his lips. She could tell what his self-control was costing him. She wanted to bury herself in his arms, to rest there and ride on and on through the night. But he was right. The flash of lights along the boulevard, the stiff figure of the chauffeur, the clamor of passing motors, robbed the moment of full perfection. The first kiss, for which she was athirst, must wait until they could shut out all the world. But she could endure little more of the longing, and told the chauffeur to turn toward home.

"I will come to you to-morrow—early in the afternoon," she said.

Reverently he kissed her hand again.

"And soon—soon—you will take me to our kingdom?"

"Soon," he promised.

They parted at her door. A long, firm clasp of the hand, a look that

searched her very soul, and he was gone, striding away like a Titan.

Laura hurried to her room. She knew there must be a glory shining in her face that would betray her if her mother should see, and to-night she did not want to explain. She did not want to think of the stormy moment when her mother must be told. This was her night of ecstasy, to be shared with none but him. Dismissing a sleepy maid, she flung off her furs and hat and confronted herself in a long mirror.

"He loves me—he loves me!" she said softly over and over again to her radiant image.

Nor was she chilled by the thought that the thing she contemplated would be, in the eyes of all the world, disgrace, that she would be an outcast. She had found herself and through this had found her great adventure. Now to live it completely—that was all she desired. And as she whispered her secret over and over to her pillow, it all seemed natural and right, a course not to be questioned. This delicately molded patrician, for good or ill, had become a super-woman, and would permit no timeworn considerations to stand between her and her desire. So, as she lay there, she made up a little prayer that was half a song and rocked herself to sleep in its rhythm:

"If I must wake to find my love a dream,
Let me not wake, dear God, let me not wake!"

But she smiled as she whispered it, for she knew that it was no dream, and that she would wake, and in the full light of day would go to him.

CHAPTER XII.

Laura wakened the next morning with a happy little cry, for her bed was flooded with sunlight. She ran her fingers through the long strands of finest copper that fell about her shoulders, and blushed at her knowledge of her

own beauty. With little birdlike catches of song, she moved about her room. Her maid heard her and came to the door, and was astonished to be told that she could have the day to herself. To Laura, this was a saint's day, and she looked forward to her meeting with the man she loved as to some beautiful ceremonial. Therefore, no one not ordained to the holy office of love might touch her vestments. A crumpled glove lay on the floor, and she picked it up and kissed it with a little joyous laugh, for it was ripped where she had torn at it to free her hand to give to him.

Isolde's passion may have been the torch that lighted this flame of love, but now it was burning clear and bright, fed from within. The sharp, poignant birth pangs of delight were passed, and merged into a splendid memory, and now Laura glowed with pure happiness. Her emotion stood the test of sunlight. She was going to him, going in the serenity of complete knowledge of what she was about to do. Tenderly she selected each article of apparel, for the finest of raiment was fustian beside the fabric of her thoughts.

Only one intruding incident marred her morning. Her mother came to her door.

"Are you coming down to breakfast, Laura?" she asked.

"I think not, dear," Laura replied. "Just send me up a little fruit."

"Are you ill?"

"No, darling, only lazy."

But she could not put her mother out of her mind at once. It was the one thing that hurt—the knowledge of how her mother would suffer. And there was no possible compromise. Either she herself must give up what meant more than life to her, or her mother, through inability to understand, must be made terribly unhappy. Perhaps she could make her mother understand. If it were merely something

between themselves, she might have been able to endure the thought of self-denial. But in the background was that other one, her lover. It was two glorious lives, completed through knowledge, as against one complacent existence, shrouded in ignorance. There could be but one decision.

It was the final battle, and Laura emerged victorious, putting out of her mind all thoughts except that of triumphant fulfillment. So the morning passed.

A tap at her door and the voice of a servant:

"A letter, Miss Laura."

Laura's heart stood still. An agony of apprehension seized her as she took the letter from the servant and saw that it was from the swadir. Locking the door, she tore open the envelope, read the first words, and with a wail sank to the floor like a bird wounded in full flight.

MY BELOVED: I must go away—

It was a long time before she could control herself sufficiently to read on. The sunlight was a mockery. The silken things against her skin tortured her.

MY BELOVED: I must go away for a while. There are things I cannot now explain. Only remember this—a love like ours is not born of nothing and cannot come to nothing. In the name of that love, I ask you to trust me when I say that for the present it is necessary I should go.

HARAJ.

Her cheeks dry and burning, Laura mechanically tore the note into the minutest fragments and listlessly let them litter the floor about her. It seemed to her that she was in the meshes of some occult mystery. The swadir spoke in riddles. While she longed for his arms about her and his lips on hers, was he merely bathing his soul in abstract emotions, which did not possess him? At least, if it had to come to this, better that it should be so before she had gone to him, her pride told her. But was it better? And

was there not yet time? What was pride to her, who had won that battle without a struggle? She could go to him still, and if he insisted even yet that he must leave her, she would have had her "crowded hour of glorious life." Swiftly she made her decision, sent for her car, donned hat and coat, and hurried to keep the broken tryst.

"I am expected," she said to the elevator attendant at the apartment house where the swadir lived.

The respectful major-domo answered her ring at the door.

"The master is not at home," he said.

Laura brushed past him.

"He must be here. I must see him," she declared.

"He has gone," the man insisted.

"Gone? Where?" she demanded, but she believed that the servant was acting under instructions, and swiftly passed from room to room. The disarray of the preliminaries of packing was evident everywhere. The swadir was not to be found. Laura returned to where the man was still standing, his features enigmatic and impassive.

"What did he tell you to do with all this?" and she waved her hand at the Oriental trappings.

"He said to pack and await orders."

"Orders from whom?"

The man shook his head slowly.

It was futile, and Laura understood that she might as well question the ivory Buddha, peering grotesquely at her from uncompleted wrappings of excelsior. She went back to her car, but the physical movement had partially relieved the tension. She was unhappy and puzzled, but the dazed numbness had passed. Her only remaining hope was that Pierre Dufresne might be in the confidence of the swadir, and she went to his studio.

The artist welcomed her with glad surprise. He did not look like a man with a secret.

"I was driving down this way,"

Laura explained, "and I thought I should like to see my portrait again. Fearful vanity, isn't it? Oh, but I forgot! I suppose the swadir has taken it with him."

"Taken it with him? Where?" Pierre asked in astonishment.

"Didn't you know he had gone away suddenly?"

"No!"

"And he hasn't taken my portrait?"

"No. I—well, I didn't want him to have it," Pierre confessed. "I made a lot of excuses to delay delivering it to him. And now he's gone?"

"Yes, improvident man. But never mind. I'll take it off your hands."

"If you don't mind, Miss Stratford, I should like to keep it myself."

Laura smiled at the irony of it. Philip had wanted it in the first place, and had gone away, never to return. Hellman had wanted it, and she had sent him away. The swadir had wanted it, she had consented, and he had gone from her. Now Pierre wanted it himself. She looked questioningly at him, and with an impulsive movement he turned to the easel and flung back the draping.

"This is the beginning of my real life as an artist," he said. "I shall paint no more portraits to pander to the vanity of silly men and women. It was the swadir who showed me that this is more than a portrait. It means much to me."

"What are you doing now?" Laura interposed.

"This," and he led her to another easel.

It was only sketched in as yet, but there was sufficient to show the strength of purpose and sweep of line. It seemed to be the figure of a woman, laughing as she faced a wind that sent her hair streaming and whipped her skirts about her. It already expressed vitality.

"You are going to call it 'Freedom,' are you not?" Laura asked.

"How did you know?" Pierre asked, startled at her quick comprehension of the vague conception.

"Isn't that the test of freedom—to be able to laugh in the teeth of the storms?" she replied.

Pierre was enchanted.

"If it is good, I owe it all to you," he said. "It was you who inspired the portrait, and it is of you I have thought as I have worked on this new theme. I am so happy that you understood at once."

He took her hand, but she drew it away gently.

"I'm glad to have accomplished something," she said, "but I think you idealize a good deal. And I think I'd better take the portrait away from you. I'll send for it soon—and now I must be off. Good-by."

Pierre watched her step into her car and drive away, across the Square, through the big arch, and up the Avenue.

"I guess I'm a sentimental fool," he said to himself. "I wonder what real love is like."

The news that the swadir had departed so suddenly was a relief as he thought of Laura, but left him, aside from that, with a little feeling of loneliness. His attachment for the man was out of all proportion to their intimacy, and it was with real regret that he contemplated never meeting him again.

The swadir's disappearance was as complete as it was sudden. Pierre made inquiries at the steamship offices, but the name was unknown at all of them. He might, of course, sail from a Pacific port, so this proved nothing. He was gone—that was all.

When the first shock had passed, Laura became fascinated by her own state of mind and passed hours in quiet introspection. She began by telling herself that Haraj had done the right thing, doubtless at great cost to himself. She

knew that he loved her. She could still feel the grip of his hand upon hers and his clear, steady gaze. Moreover, no man who did not love tremendously could have turned away from her lips as she had offered them to him that night after "Tristan." She smiled scornfully at the thought of how quickly any common man would have seized upon the advantage offered by her mood. But Haraj, with superhuman determination, had turned away. He feared to take what she was so eager to give, and his fear could only have been for her. He knew what it would have meant for her to go with him, and was able to renounce her self-sacrifice.

She knew that, by all the laws of human kind, she should be glad of her escape from the public disgrace, but though the first bitterness of her grief was spent, she was not glad. And always her thoughts brought her back to this realization—that if he should ever return, or if he should ever send word to her that he was waiting, even though it were clear across the world, she would go to him.

Meanwhile, she burned the ardor of her emotion in outbursts of affection for her mother, atoning for a wound she had not inflicted. Sometimes she would go to her mother at night, after Mrs. Stratford had retired, and surprise the bewildered lady with kisses, long embraces, and murmured words of affection. It was a gratifying reconciliation, after the partial estrangement, and a calm descended upon the household.

Then came a cablegram from Paris, announcing that Philip Brand was on his way home.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Well, here I am! Say it to my face!" Philip shouted, as he entered Pierre's studio unceremoniously, a fortnight later.

"You old son of a gun!" Pierre sprang across the room to welcome his friend. "When did you arrive?"

This was not the manner in which he had planned to receive Philip. He had intended to be aloof, ironical, and a little grouchy. But he had been surprised into being natural.

"About an hour ago. I came straight from the dock. Look," and, leading the artist to the window, he showed him a taxicab disgorging luggage in front of the house across the Square.

Pierre was mollified by this proof of friendship.

"And now tell me everything that has happened since I went away—everything important," Philip ordered. "It shouldn't taken long."

"It won't. I painted Miss Stratford's portrait, Hellman nearly got himself engaged to her and the swadir broke it up, Miss Stratford struck up a close friendship with the swadir, and I nearly fell in love with her myself."

"And I was right about Hellman."

"Not by a damn' sight! They would be married right now if it hadn't been for your queer friend. Say, Phil—what is he—a priest, or a king, or what?"

"A little of both. But tell me—have you seen Laura lately?"

"Not since the swadir disappeared. Oh, yes, that's another bit of news. He's dropped off the face of the earth. You don't happen to know where he is now, do you?"

"You never can tell about him. He may be right here in New York in some strange disguise. I'll see if I can locate him."

"Do you use his method? He hinted that you were getting psychic," Pierre said.

"Never mind about that. I want more news about Laura."

"So you have decided to marry her? Serve you right if she turns you down."

"I said I wanted news about her," Philip persisted.

"They ain't none," Pierre replied stubbornly. "She hasn't been going out much lately. I have a hunch—just a little bit of a hunch—that—well, I wouldn't call it love, exactly, but that she was pretty much cut up by the way the swadir disappeared without saying good-by."

"Oho! I didn't think Laura would allow herself to become interested in a nigger."

"He's not a nigger," Pierre retorted, almost angrily. "He's a friend of mine, and you've got to speak respectfully about him or not at all."

"He's a friend of mine, too," Philip replied. "But how about that portrait you painted? Where is it?"

Pierre unveiled it for him. He never left it uncovered for chance visitors to see.

"Splendid!" Philip exclaimed. "The finest thing you've ever done! I'll take it home with me."

"Oh, no, you won't! A lot of people want that picture, but Miss Stratford has decided to keep it for herself."

"Nonsense! It was understood all along——"

"A great many things have happened since then. I tell you it belongs to her, and you can't have it—you, nor the swadir, nor Hellman, nor even myself. We all wanted it."

"I'm not surprised. But I'll get it—you'll see."

"Maybe and maybe not. You seem to think you can start right in where you left off. I think you have a surprise or two coming to you, and I hope you get all you deserve."

"We usually do, don't we?" Philip commented quietly.

"Well, I wish you luck. You know that," Pierre replied.

They gossiped a while, and Philip left.

A few minutes later, the wanderer,

now home again, called the Stratford house on the telephone.

"Tell Miss Stratford Mr. Brand wishes to speak to her," he said to the servant.

A moment later the voice came back over the wires:

"Miss Stratford is not at home."

This was curious. The servant surely would have known, in the first place, if Laura had been out. It looked as if she had deliberately refused to speak to him. Later, he called again, and was told Laura would not be home until late that evening. So he wrote a note, asking her to telephone to him, no matter how late it might be when she returned, and sent it to her home by his chauffeur. He stayed in the house all evening, hovering about the telephone, trying to read, and smoking incessantly, but the bell did not ring. At one o'clock in the morning, he was tempted to try to reach her again, but changed his mind. His note might have been mislaid, and it would be silly to wake her, and if she had simply ignored his request, it would be worse than silly. So he went to bed and tossed about for hours.

In the morning he called again and asked for Laura's mother. Her cordiality was some consolation. But she said Laura had not come down yet, and she did not know whether or not Laura had received the note.

"Will you please tell her," Philip said, "that unless I hear from her in one hour, I am going to come up and camp on the doorstep until I see her?"

Mrs. Stratford took the message to her daughter. Laura made no comment. She could not quite understand why she did not want to see Philip, and she knew it was foolish to try to avoid him forever. But she had just been through a terrific emotional struggle, and had regained her self-possession. Philip would be a vivid reminder of Haraj, and she felt that she could not

endure this, or his inevitable inquiries about his friend. Yet what could she do? One thing she would not do, and that was telephone to him. Let him camp on the doorstep if he liked. She wondered if he would.

He did.

An hour later, he drove up in his car and dismissed it. Turning up his overcoat collar, for a raw wind was blowing, he grinned and sat down on the doorstep. Mrs. Stratford glanced out, saw him, and hurried to tell Laura.

"He's done it!" she exclaimed in dismay. "He's sitting out in front of the house!"

Laura giggled. It was the first thing that had really amused her in weeks. She peered out, cautiously concealing herself, and shook with mirth at the figure huddled on the step.

"How long do you suppose he'll stay there?" she asked her mother. "Let's make a bet."

"Laura! Do bring him in. What will people say?"

"Oh, bother people! This is a real lark. I think I'll sing for him."

Opening a window slightly, so that he might hear, she went to the piano and sang two little ballads. Then she peeked again. Philip had not changed his position, but a fine rain had begun to fall, and he had turned down the brim of his soft hat to shed the water. Laura called a maid.

"Take an umbrella out to the gentleman on the doorstep," she ordered, and the wondering girl obeyed. In a moment she brought back a message:

"Mr. Brand sends his thanks; and asks if you will please sing 'A Perfect Day.'"

Laura laughed outright. She could not resist his good humor, and went to the door herself. Opening it slightly, she called out:

"If you'll go to the back door, I'll have the cook give you some food. We don't serve lunch in front."

Philip turned to look at her, but did not rise.

"Does that cheerful sound mean that I may come in?" he asked.

"You seem to be in a frantic hurry to see me all of a sudden," Laura replied. "You managed to get along very nicely for nearly a year."

"A camel can go for days without water, but he'll die of thirst, like any other animal, if he doesn't get it some time," Philip retorted.

"Oh, come in and don't be foolish!" and Laura opened the door wide.

"Thank you, Laura," he said, "but I haven't been foolish. I've been simply direct."

Laura's fear that Philip would talk about the swadir was unfounded. He did not even mention the potentate, but asked only about New York acquaintances. He told her he had seen Pierre, and that he expected their original agreement about the portrait to be carried out. Laura could not think of any reasonable objection. That fine friendliness she had always liked so much in Philip was reasserting itself. She felt at home with him, and saw now how stupid she had been to try to avoid him.

"And you'll come down and select the place to hang it?" he asked.

"Certainly, if you wish."

"I do. I'll come for you to-morrow afternoon."

When he left, he went directly to Pierre and gloated like a schoolboy. The artist smiled at his glee.

"And to-morrow she's coming down to decide where it is to hang," Philip added. "So send it over first thing in the morning, please."

Pierre confronted him gravely and put both hands on his shoulders.

"Tell me, Phil, how well do you love her?"

"Better than you, who never have loved, can possibly understand," Philip

replied, and his voice was low and vibrant.

CHAPTER XIV.

With that magic possible only in the homes of the wealthy, Philip's house had already become once more a home-like place. Its big, old-fashioned rooms were crowded with memories. Philip had been born here, and it had been the only place he could ever consider home. After his parents died, just after he had left college, he had thought that he would feel lost in it, and had tried for a time living at hotels and clubs, but always the longing had returned for the deep serenity and seclusion of the big house. No ultramodern decorator had been permitted to lay impious hands upon it. Philip's mother had furnished it with keen discrimination, and while styles may change, aristocracy endures, so Philip had not found it necessary to make any alterations in the general scheme.

"It's always delightfully restful here," Laura remarked the next day, as Philip led her to the broad fireplace where a huge log was blazing.

"I'm glad you like it," he replied. "It's a real home to me."

They sat on a long, low couch, facing the fire, and looked into the flames. It was the first time Laura ever had been alone here with Philip, and she felt a comfortable intimacy. The strain of their first meeting after his long absence had been broken merrily the day before, and he was once more the man who had occupied so large a place in her life before he had gone away. Yet not exactly that, either, for now she knew herself better, and interposed between them was a vivid experience whose phases were not in any degree forgotten, though their outlines were dimmer. They gazed into the fire, each occupied with thoughts of the other, until a big, patriarchal clock harmoniously interrupted.

"We're forgetting the picture," Laura reminded Philip.

"So we are," he agreed, and they began a tour of the living room, the music room, and the library.

"It wants a bright light," Laura ventured.

"And the brightest light is in the living room, just above the fireplace," said Philip.

So they returned to the fire, and Philip had two servants hold the portrait in position. Laura agreed that the placing was perfect, and a Corot promptly made way for a Dufresne. When the hanging was completed, they returned to the couch.

"This has always been my favorite spot in all the house," Philip said. "It's even more so now."

Laura smiled and looked into the fire again. The log had burned nearly in two in the middle, and she speculated idly how long it would be before it broke beneath its own weight. Philip tossed the end of a cigarette into the fire, and as he put his hand down beside him again, it touched Laura's, and remained. She wanted to draw hers away, but she found it physically impossible. Something was holding their hands together like a vise, though their fingers barely touched. Laura's conscious will struggled impotently against her desires. Philip moved closer, and she swayed toward him.

In another instant, she was in his arms, and he was whispering inaudible words of love in her ear.

"You won't ever leave me again, Philip—ever?"

"Never, never!"

And the kiss that the swadir might have taken was given to Philip Brand, and all the hunger of a heart that had loved and been denied fed upon his lips. For a moment she knew nothing, remembered nothing, but was swept away in the long-pent torrent of emotion. Then when, for very weariness, she re-

laxed, an apparition appeared, and she tore herself away from him.

"Philip!" she gasped. "Oh!"

"What is it, dearest?" he asked.

"There's something you must know—something I can't understand, myself."

"Nothing can matter now," Philip assured her.

"Wait until you've heard," she replied, and told him the story of her relations with the swadir. She told it falteringly, not because she was trying to shield herself, but because there were so many things she could not explain. She tried to find the exact point when her liking for the swadir as an intellectual companion had dissolved in the more intense feeling, but she could not. She wanted Philip to realize that she had not been under any psychic spell, but had been entirely normal at all times. So she went on to the end, and told him how she had gone to the swadir's apartment in search of him, even after she had received his note.

"But that's all over now," he said gently. "He's gone, and I have come back. You love me, and that wipes out everything that has been."

"That's just it!" Laura moaned. "It isn't wiped out! Don't you see, Philip, I love you both? Oh, it's terrible!"

"What do you mean?" he asked, and if Laura had looked up, she would have been astonished at his smile.

"If Haraj should come in at that door this moment, I don't know which of you I should choose," she declared. "What if we should marry, and then he should come back? I think my love for you is greater, because you are here, but I can't trust myself so long as there is a possibility that he may return. All I felt as you held me in your arms just now I felt as he and I sat with our hands clasped that night. I dare not decide—dare not let you urge me."

"Perhaps, if you are alone a little while, you can think it out," Philip said.

"I'll leave you a few moments. Try to see into your heart."

Philip left her, but she could not think. Her heart was crying out for him, but her mind was in a turmoil. She flung herself prone upon the couch and wondered what was to become of her. As she lay there, she heard a familiar voice, and thought it was a trick of her overwrought nerves. It was the voice of Haraj, calling her by name:

"Laura."

She heard it again, nearer. It seemed to be just outside the door of the room. She looked up, startled, and saw the swadir standing in the doorway. He held a corner of his robe before his face, the robe of the seven suns she knew so well, and the emerald gleamed from his turban.

"I've come to ask you to forgive me, Laura," he said, in his curious inflections.

"Haraj!" she cried. "Is it really you?"

"It is really I," he said, lowering the robe, and the face of the swadir was the face of Philip Brand, white, smooth-shaven, and unspectacled.

"You—Philip—the swadir—Haraj!" she gasped.

He took from his mouth a flat, thick contrivance of soft rubber, and spoke in his natural voice.

"This is the last of the swadir—God rest his soul!"

"You tricked me! You played with me!" Laura blazed at him, her eyes flashing.

"It was anything but play," he replied, but she would not listen, and was halfway to the door.

"Let me go! Don't speak to me!" she said in low, tense tones, as he stopped her.

"Laura—wait! After what has passed between us, you must listen to me a moment, and then judge."

She paused in her flight and looked at him, undecided.

"Well?" she demanded defiantly.

"Not like that," he pleaded. "Come—sit down again."

Reluctantly she permitted him to lead her back to the fire, but drew away from him stiffly as they sat once more on the long couch.

"Do you recall the night I told you I was going away? It was then I decided I must know what we meant to each other. I couldn't endure the thought that we might be just like so many others—idly living, idly loving, idly marrying. How could I be certain that we were different except by testing myself first—then you? I went to India, and your dear face followed me. In the clamor of the bazaars and the silence of the jungles, I heard your voice. I needed you that I might live, for you were half my life.

"So I assumed the disguise of the swadir, left letters to be mailed to you and Pierre on specified dates, and came to New York. It was the surest way to find the real Laura, and reveal you to yourself as well as to me. If your love was great enough, I knew it would unconsciously penetrate the disguise and overcome all obstacles of custom and appearance, and so richly reward my quest. Remember, I was risking my chance of a half happiness for this supreme revelation. I wanted to know you, and I wanted you to know yourself. Is it nothing to you now to see that you are bigger and stronger than all the laws and conventionalities that surround you—that when the crisis arises you are capable of ruling your own destiny? Is not that knowledge worth any price?"

As he spoke, Laura's anger died away. The first shock of what seemed like humiliation could not bruise the deep sincerity of her inmost feelings, and her heart warmed toward Philip again.

"But how could you go as you did without telling me?" she asked. "It

was cruel! And yet—I see now—that, too, was part of it—that after you had left me, I should not tell myself I had escaped a shameful fate, but know I had missed a wonderful joy. It is all clear now—but, oh, Philip, how I suffered!”

“I know, but I had to go. It would have caused too many complications and embarrassments if everybody had been let in on the secret, and as it was not for long, I thought it was best that I should go as I did. It was only until I had time to bleach out, you know.”

“I still think I ought to hate you a little,” she said, with a *moue*.

“Laura,” he replied, “twice you’ve told me in such a manner that to doubt would be to insult you that you love me. I will not insult you—you do love me.”

He gathered her in his arms again, and she could not, if she had so desired, resist. If he had offended a thousand times as greatly, she knew that only in the haven of his love could she find peace and happiness. And when the first moments of keen joy had passed, she laughed to think what a strange adventure it had been.

“What an actor you would have made! It wasn’t only your make-up that took us in, though that was perfect—your brown skin and your spectacles and your hump and all—but you really lived the part, you were the swadiv. What fun it must have been, Philip, you old faker!”

“Think of poor old Pitterby,” he laughed, “and his map of Nakahal in his next edition. I must send him an occult warning from some mysterious source.”

“How did you know he would be at the reception?” Laura asked.

“Laura, have you ever left The Pitterby off your list? You couldn’t do it, you know. It isn’t being done. And Pitterby, scenting an Oriental, could not have stayed away. That was easy.”

“And of course,” Laura mused, “you remembered the Blenhasset gossip from the year before.”

“Yes, Miss Watson—you understand your Sherlock’s psychic methods perfectly.”

She considered a moment.

“But, Philip, how could you know, on the twenty-seventh of December, that we would be home in three days when we had told no one?”

“In ten years, to my knowledge, beloved one, your darling mother has not missed the New Year’s Eve cotillion.”

“Mother will be very happy, Philip.”

“And so will Pierre—the old match-maker!”

“That makes four of us, doesn’t it?” she whispered.

And not even the harmonious patriarchal clock was noticed as the shadows lengthened and darkness began to descend upon the Square.

But Pierre, watching for hours from his windows opposite, stretched himself and decided that he would watch no longer. He had seen them go into the house, and they had not come out. It wouldn’t take so long to hang a whole gallery of portraits. He knew that his services were no longer required, and that he might now dedicate his life to his art.

He was a little sorry for his friend the swadiv.

VICTORY

YOU were my Menelaus, I your Troy.

Lay down your sword and enter; you have won.

Vanquished are all my temples in the sun;

Now they are yours—to treasure or destroy.

H. THOMPSON RICH.



N O W

By Charles Saxby

Author of "The Temple Girl,"
"Saving Régine," etc.



CRAIG did not need to look up to know who it was that approached. The sound of the footsteps told him that, a woman's steps, coming with a slight drag of listlessness in them and the click of high heels on the cobblestones outside. There was only one woman in Loanda who would be coming to the wireless station at this time of night.

He rather resented her coming at all. Part of that resentment was the severity of youth, strictly on duty at its first post of responsibility; part of it was due to the knowledge that it was not in the least for his sake that she came. Had it been another than himself who sat there through the night watch, she would have come just the same, as if she were driven by some secret, desperate need. He had thought, sometimes, that her errand of expectation of some intensely private message that might flash in any moment from those wires overhead was merely an excuse. He suspected that it was rather the place itself that she sought, perhaps for relief from that heat-worn, hectic town down there, or perhaps for the safety of some memory the isolated little station might hold for her.

Irritatedly he watched the sagging gateway in the yellow wall through which she must come. He liked that wall, especially on such nights as these, when it rose in the moonlight, from the dusty, twisting aloes at its base, sharp

against the deep blue of the sky; a simple scene enough, one of hundreds such in that half-forgotten city, but to Craig that crumbling wall, that writhing desert vegetation, hot and motionless under the moon as a stage setting, came as if it were food for some inner hunger of his mind. It all spoke to him so plainly of where he was; it was so exactly what he had always imagined Africa must be. It was such luck, his being there. Had it not been that nearly all the English operators on the coast had been summoned for war duty, he, as a mere chance young American, might have whistled long for such a post. Even after three months, he could hardly believe it at times. That was why he sat there on the steps of the wooden shack that housed the instruments, soaking himself in the aching splendor of the equatorial night, convincing himself all over again that it was really true.

He whispered it over to himself, hastening to catch the few moments in which he would still be alone:

"I'm actually here—I'm actually in Africa—now!"

He liked the sound of that final "now;" it came with such a satisfying sense of presence in it, such a cancellation of those years of a longing "when."

He started resentfully as those disturbing footsteps came nearer, echoing through the tunnelliike gateway in the wall. He wished she'd let him alone,

Then the woman emerged, clear in the moonlight, a slight figure in flimsy white, moving with a listlessness of grace that hinted at an utter abandonment. As that drag in her footsteps had subtly suggested even while she was still unseen, she gave an impression of moving in some region beyond the confines of hope. Yet she must still be hoping for something, or why was she there at all?

For all its youth, her quaint little face was worn and tired, pale with years of that exhausting climate, but it held a certain beauty that was set off by the scarlet cactus blossoms in her hair. Perhaps the instinct for adornment is the last thing a woman abandons, thought Craig, as he rose. He wondered at her greatly. He always did that, for she had a faculty—though always the same—of always coming as if it were the first time.

"Any news for me?" she asked, as she came forward.

Her voice and accent were good—like her father's, Craig reflected, remembering the contrast between that drink-driven wreck of an Englishman and the tones that fell from his lips. It was queer what vicissitudes a habit of speech will come through unchanged. In the case of this girl's father, those lingering suggestions of a past culture were as the sign and seal of the tragedy of his self-wrecked life.

Craig shook his head at her question, and then, to assuage the bleakness of his denial, added, "Not yet." That was always the way they began; it had come to be almost a ritual between them. She looked up at the network of humming wires suspended far above them between the slender steel shafts.

"Oh, well—I'll wait a while," she answered.

That was part of the ritual, too, and she sank down on the steps at his feet, too absorbed in her own affairs to pre-

tend an interest in him that she did not feel.

Looking down at her, Craig silently wondered again. It was strange that she, like himself of a race alien to this land, so obviously a product of civilization, so subtly of that civilization's byways, should tone in so well with the exotic suggestions of the place and the night. It was that abandonment of hers, he thought. Like this Africa all about them, she seemed to have had all her pretenses and concealments burned from her. Even so, he never knew just how to take her. But then he did not know, as yet, how to take Africa either. He was still looking on, rather than taking; a spectator rather than an actor.

He thought of the place where she lived, that out-at-elbows Hotel Victoria down on the water front, which accorded her father a tottering support, a place purely tropical in its mixture of squalor and picturesqueness; a place of rickety stairways and dusty rooms, all her pretenses and concealments taints, in which, despite the sweep of the trade wind, the air remained obstinately stale and reminiscent of past occupants. He could see again its glaring walls under the noonday sun, could almost smell the paint blistering on its jealousies. He remembered its courtyard, always sloppy under foot, full of green-painted tables on which the oleander trees dropped a perpetual rain of sun-scorched buds, blistered by the heat before ever they had a chance to unfold, and the male riffraff who sat round them at night, human flotsam, borne unresistingly on the easiest currents of life, until they came to a final stagnation in this social Sargasso Sea of the west coast of Africa.

Her father had always reminded Craig of some imposing piece of furniture, the core of which had been eaten out by white ants—a shell of a man, his brain devoured by the mag-

gots of drink, who dropped quotations in polished Greek hexameters and plucked aimlessly at his mouth meanwhile. And the girl herself, palely struggling week in and week out to obtain some semblance of order from a mob of leering, black-and-tan good-for-nothings who passed as servants, as insolent as they dared to be, most cringing when most obstinate—she had always reminded him of one of those pitiful oleander buds that dropped on the stained tables in that courtyard, blighted by an exposure to too fierce a sun.

"How long have you been here?" she asked suddenly, without troubling to look up at him.

"About three months."

"Three months—six days—and nine hours," she corrected, checking off the time with a dreary exactitude. "The steamer left at five in the afternoon. You came in on the very same one that took *him* away."

"Him? Oh." Craig remembered, with an effort, the name of his predecessor at the station, whose summons to the war had left the post open for himself. "I see. You mean Gordon?"

"Whom else should I mean?" she asked.

The very flatness of her tone was proof of its sincerity, and Craig wondered again as he recollected his brief glimpse of the man, an ordinary-looking chap, hardly the one to be suspected of being "who else" to any one.

There seemed nothing to say, and they relapsed into silence again. Then, from the instrument room behind them, came the click of the key he had left open—a sharp, recurring signal, repeated again and again in irritating persistence. But Craig's trained ears—those operator's ears, entirely distinct from the ones he used for everyday intercourse—had already noted the signal and passed it over without troubling his conscious brain. As he sat there,

in passive ignoring of the signal, the girl reached up and caught him by the knee.

"Listen! Don't you hear?"

"Hear what? Oh—*that!*" he answered, making connection, with an effort, with those other ears of his. "That's not for us." He listened again, picking up the threads as they came disjointedly from the instrument. "They're calling Lagos. It's an Elder Dempster boat—off Cape Palmas."

Her hand slid from his knee, and she sank back again into her listless self-absorption. As he listened idly to the message that clicked in from the reaches of the sea, Craig formed a hazy picture of that distant steamer, plowing northward through a deep-blue crystal of night and sea and sky, trailing a wake of green fire. Lagos was answering now; nothing important—just the idle gossip of a couple of operators, five hundred miles apart.

Down in the city, a bell struck the hour, humming resonantly between the taps of that aerial chat dribbling in from nowhere in particular. One o'clock—and it would be one o'clock up there in Lagos, too—and in Cape Town and Tangiers and wherever that meridian of Loanda might go. His mind raced up and down that imaginary line segmenting the surface of the earth. Wherever it went, it was one o'clock, and whatever was going on there was going on now.

It was always "now" everywhere. He remembered the time when he had first realized that, when, at his first turn at a key, he had heard the messages telling of happenings at that very instant a thousand miles away. Before that, to him, those distant places had always swung in space at the end of a long journey, but in that instant he had seen that it was "now" in them also, and it had wrenched his mind apart with the sense of a sweeping, perpetual present.

It was blowing off Cape Palmas now, that message said, as it vibrated the key behind him. And in Lagos it was raining—"hot as hell and black as a Dutchman's hat." Then the long-distance gossip, so rare in those almost tenantless airs, died away, leaving a little hole of emptiness in the night.

Conscious that the girl was speaking again, Craig pulled himself back to his actual surroundings. But it was for herself she was speaking rather than for him, he saw. It was as if she were arguing with something in her own mind.

"Three months—and he promised he'd write," she muttered, as if in answer to some weary persistence within herself. "Three months, and he hasn't written yet!"

"Perhaps he did write, and the mail boat got submarined," Craig suggested, but she brushed aside the proffered crumb of comfort.

"The boat came in this morning, and the English mail was on it all right," she replied half fiercely. "Well, I don't care, anyway. My mind is made up."

There was anger in her voice, but it rang hollow, as if she were whipping it up. That was more noticeable as she went violently on:

"And he promised he'd send me messages by the wireless, too! Night after night I've come up here and waited—but you don't see them coming, do you?"

"He'd have to have a mighty powerful instrument to reach us down here," Craig objected.

"I don't care. He said he would and he ought to. And now he can't blame me if—if—" She choked and relapsed into a silence that lasted long, broken only by the hum of the wires overhead and the creak of a rusty, weather-beaten coconut palm as a vagrant puff of air stirred its fronds.

Craig's imaginings strayed northward after the man who had been so sud-

denly pulled before his notice. It was easy to picture him sitting on those very steps, as he must have sat through many such nights as this. With that as a starting point, Craig tried to follow Gordon to wherever he might be, a unit lost in the grim struggle on the plains of France.

But, like most wireless operators, he found his imagination limited, in some strange way, by the sending power of his own instrument. Given a powerful station, he could sweep half the world in a mental flash, but the radius of Loanda was only a little north of Tengeriffe, and Craig found that his "now" stopped far short of the Azores. All he could picture of the bloody shambles of the war was a huge mouth that swallowed men by the thousands and then spat them forth again, half-chewed remnants of humanity.

"Perhaps he's had no chance to send any messages," he said soothingly. "Remember he's at the war."

"War," the girl echoed drearily. "How I hate it! If it hadn't been for that, we should have been married long before this."

"Married? You and Gordon—married!" Craig exclaimed before he could stop himself, and, in the ensuing silence, he knew that she had understood all that exclamation implied.

"Well, why not?" she asked, with a fierceness that he felt was rather for the absent man than for herself, as if it were he whom she was protecting. "Have you ever heard any ill of me?"

Craig had not. It had been merely an idea born of the girl's surroundings and that futile father of hers. Yet the fact that she had understood so well counted against her, he thought in the hardness of his youth. Then he softened, feeling the underlying bitterness of that too clear understanding. Then he hardened again, remembering a figure that haunted the Hotel Victoria—a yellow-fingered Portuguese, Da Cruz

by name; a fat beast with a smile of oily sinisterness, of whom unpleasant things were openly said, perhaps the least unpleasant being that he had made his money in the slave trade down in the interior of Benguella.

As the girl glanced up at him, rigid on the steps above her in his tropical white, she jumped to her feet in another of her sudden violences.

"Oh—you are right! Even if it isn't true, they all of them think it just the same! Why shouldn't they, with things as they are? And that shows me that I am right, too. If I married him, it would follow us everywhere. The wireless men would see to that. The man here would know the story, and he'd pass it on round the world, as the boys gossip with each other at night. You can't get away from the wireless if you are of it. Nights up here with Gordon, I've heard the stories dropping in—stories of men in Cape Town and Hongkong and everywhere. Do you suppose my story wouldn't go out to them, too? And he knows it. How could he help it? He was just amusing himself with me, and now he's gone. All right—I'll go, too! I'll go this very morning!"

"Where will you go?" asked Craig, struck by the finality of her tone.

"To Madeira, if you want to know."

Craig nodded, remembering that the Lisbon boat would be leaving in a few hours. He remembered, too, that he had heard, with a feeling of relief, that the Da Cruz creature had taken passage on her to Funchal. The water front had been riotous that evening with his farewells. Then, struck by a sudden thought, he looked sharply at the girl.

"To Madeira?" he asked, and she nodded boldly, with a hard, mirthless laugh.

"And the boy guessed right! You've got my number now, haven't you? And it's just what you expected, what you've all of you been expecting

for years. I've heard you. 'That girl Maude down at the Victoria'—and then you grin and shrug your shoulders. It would be a pity to disappoint you all, wouldn't it?" Then, with a shuddering glance at the tapering masts of the wireless, she burst out, "Oh, if he'd only written—or something!"

"He may be wounded," said Craig hotly. "A lot of the wireless boys have been hurt."

"No. I'd know it if he were," she replied, with a nod at the wires overhead. "That isn't the only way, you know. I'd know it if anything happened to him. And suppose he is hurt," she went on boldly, as if bent, for some mysterious reason, on putting herself in the worst light. "What of me then? I have to do the best I can for myself, haven't I? And Da Cruz—" She shivered slightly, but went on with an increased, jeering hardness, "He has a villa at Funchal—and he's rolling in money. He'll give me anything I want."

"He'll give you—yes," said Craig somberly, "but what will he be to you?" She broke at that, sinking down on the steps, torn by fierce, dry sobs. Craig looked at her, divided between pity and a young man's horror of a troubled woman. He hated the whole affair, angry with her for bringing it there during his hours of duty, furious with the absent Gordon for leaving so many loose ends slopping round to entangle his successor. He hated it still more as he heard the girl's next words, which came in panting disconnection as she fought with her rebellious breath:

"I've thought of that. You needn't think I haven't. I've thought of little else these last few days. But it isn't going to be. If it comes to the worst, I can always fall overboard. All I want is just to go away with him! Oh, if he'd only written or something!"

"Can't you trust Gordon's honor?" asked Craig, and she laughed again un-

til the place rang, under the emptiness of the moon, with her jeering clamor.

"Trust and honor! A fine chance I've had to learn about them, haven't I? Oh, you *baby!*" she cried, with a sudden reversion to scorn. "Can't you see that's just what I'm afraid of? But of course you can't. What man would—unless he were a *man?* Three months—and he's never written! Do you suppose I don't know what that means? Down here, I was the only one. Besides, things don't matter in Africa, anyway. But up there, he's back among his own kind. There are women there, too—nurses and Red Cross women—ladies, a lot of them—all that I never had a chance to be."

Craig stared at her in astonishment, a wild creature, shaking with a torrent of vehemence, as if the relief of her outpouring were too great to be foregone.

"Do you suppose he hasn't seen his mistake by now?" she demanded. "If he hadn't, he'd have written. And if he doesn't, don't you suppose I see it for him? I've heard it all from father, time and again. He married the wrong sort of woman, he says, and that's why he's as he is. Do you suppose I want *him* to go that way, because of me? And I know him. Once he's given his word, he'll stick to it. He'd never let me know. But I'd know it all the time. And if I do this—if I go away like this—it will set him free—don't you see? It'll be just what everybody expected all along, and there'll be no one who will blame him—"

She flung herself down on the steps again, her thin shoulders shaken with a storm of passion. Craig, hovering above her in a half-resentful helplessness, wondered again. He was learning things that night, and the knowledge rather appalled him; it knocked from under him so much of the satisfied mental underpinning on which he had hitherto reared his views of things

in general and of women in particular. Up in the instrument room, the key clicked uncertainly, but he did not heed it. It was merely the fag end of some message from too far off to reach him properly. There were numbers of those every night, spent vagrants of space that slipped through the interstices of the air, too languid to do more than rattle the key in a meaningless fashion.

He stood there, miserably aware that he ought to do something, angry with the girl for making him feel so futile. Why did she bring her mess of a life to him? He couldn't settle it. He wished she would take herself off and relieve him of the burden her presence had become. At last she seemed to sense something of his attitude and raised herself up in a renewed hardness.

"All right—I'll go. I knew it was no use coming up here to-night, but then one always hopes, you know. Oh, yes, one hopes—right up to the last and right past it, too. But one doesn't find that out until afterward. You're generally past the end before ever you know it."

She rose, poised for leaving, in a sullen heat of rebellion. To Craig, as he looked at her, there came again that simile of sun-blighted buds on the oleander trees. There had been no merciful shadow over her life, no cool obscurity in which she could unfold; she had been dragged too early into the bitter light.

He found all the things he knew he ought to say cleaving to his tongue. Smooth platitudes of right and wrong, of advice and exhortation—even as the conventions themselves shrivel in the African air, so those stock phrases shriveled on his lips.

With a last upward glance at the pale shafts of the wireless, she raised her arms above her head in a gesture of such utter hopelessness as to be almost

superb. Then she let them fall again as if she had forgotten their very existence.

"I—I can understand your feelings," stammered Craig.

"Those weren't feelings. Those were God's truth," she answered. "Well, I know when to cut my hook, and you're pretty tired of me, aren't you? Fellows generally do get tired of a girl when she stops being amusing. All right—I'm off."

With a languid nod, she turned toward the blistered green door in the yellow wall. As she had come through it, so would she go again, and this time she would not return. To Craig the whole scene, in the hot blue motionlessness of the night, suddenly took on the aspect of a moving picture on a screen. She would go through that door. Then what? What does become of people who go through doors on those pictured screens?

In the instrument room, the key clicked haltingly. Then it speeded up, sharper and more distinct, and this time its call penetrated instantly to Craig's brain, attuned to just that vibration.

"Id—Id—Id—Id!" It came faintly, but with an insistence in it, as if an anxious hand pressed on that other key, so lost in distance. Glad of the interruption, he wheeled hastily to the steps, but before he could reach them, the message began to come, without waiting for his answering signal.

"Loanda—Loanda—I—hope—you—get—my—" For a moment it died away into an indistinguishable murmur; then, as if spurred by Craig's impatient exclamation, it sharpened once more into distinctness: "—few—chances—to—send—but—to—night—more—favorable—ought—to—reach—you—"

"Stop!" cried Craig to the girl, who, instinctively aware of something strange, was clinging to him, her face wild with renewed hope. "No—let me

go!" he exclaimed, as she began to push him toward the steps. "I can get it from here. Hush! 'I'm—Gordon,'" he went on, catching the thread as the key clicked again, "'Gordon—Gordon—do—you—get—that—Loanda—can't—tell—you—where—I—am—against—orders—and—you—can't—reply—anyhow—out—of—your—range—am—sending—in—hopes—of—reaching—you—if—any—of—the—boys—get—this—relay—to—Loanda—and—help—a—fellow—out—for—God's—sake—tell—Maude—I—am—same—to—her—as—I—know—she—is—to—me—send—love—love—love—'" Hell, I've lost it!" muttered Craig impatiently, as the key fluttered to a standstill.

"Answer him, quick!" whispered the girl, and Craig, still struggling against that compelling arm, found himself whispering back, as if because of some ridiculous fear of disturbing that other man at that other key, all of three thousand miles away:

"I can't, I tell you. I haven't the power. Besides, I don't know how to call him. You'll have to write." He looked harshly at her as he recollected her announced plans, and went deliberately on, "You can drop him a line—from Madeira."

But his words seemed to slide past her ears unnoticed, and he saw that, in some unexplained way, it was he alone who was doing that remembering; she seemed to have forgotten entirely. The hardness of her face, like a mask upon its quaint beauty, had broken, and down it coursed a stream of tears. She looked, he thought, as one of those oleanders might have looked under the influence of some unexpected night of coolness and nurturing dew. She was refreshed. There was about her a sense of a beginning, an unfolding.

"He said *that*!" she murmured, catching at his arm in appeal. "That he was just the same as ever—he said

it! And he's been saying it all along, only you didn't get the messages!"

Then a shadow fell across her face again, and the eyes she turned to him were troubled.

"How long does it take?" she asked breathlessly. "It's so far—and he may have changed since then."

"Since when, for Heaven's sake?" asked Craig, in bewilderment.

"Since he sent that message. Don't you see? It's so beastly far. How long is it since then?"

"Why—no time at all, of course. You can't measure it," he almost

shouted at her. "He's there—wherever that is—at the key this very moment."

"You mean—*now*?" she asked.

"Yes—now—now—now!"

He glanced back over his shoulder, wondering if the dawn could have broken already, but the moon-silvered wall, the rusty palm, rose sheer against the unstained blue of the night sky. Then he saw that that light came really from within the girl herself, and he caught her accents of a joyous wonder:

"Oh—he's saying it—he's *saying* it—*now*!"



SEA-BORN

SEABORN was the name she bore, this maiden of the sea;
And had they sifted all the store of given names, a hundred score,
They could have found none better, for none fitter could there be;
Born a hundred leagues from shore, sea-born was she.

And like her foster mother free, sparkling and fresh and wild,
Soul of the surf to clay like me, whirled from his gloom by whitecap glee,
Yet summer-smooth when in the lee, her eyes adream and mild,
Blind to the quaking of a knee once rock to the quaking child.

And still a child, though rash as stone in the teeth of the spring-mad main;
But wistful when her lips made known that she was mine and mine alone,
A shy, a lovely budding Joan who kissed me once again
To pledge herself my very own—gift without stain.

Lips that have plighted troth in vain! O Lord of Nazareth,
Make her a wave to drown my pain! For she is gone. Behold a seine
Whose purse her going cut in twain! What good are lips or breath
When she who gave them life is slain, dragged down to death?

RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER.



The Joyous Dreamer

By Vennette Herron

Author of "When Sirens Clash,"

"Lolita," etc.

CHAPTER I.

AND, by the way, Dick, here's a list of a few things I didn't have time to attend to. Will you just look it over and see to 'em for me? You'll have plenty of time, while you're waiting round this week—and—er—I haven't much cash with me, so—er—just charge it up to the company. I'll make it all right with the office. And—er—hadn't you better be going ashore? Er—good-by."

The speaker was a short, pompous little man, of forty or thereabouts. He was dressed in a blue suit and a yachting cap, and was obviously proud of his appropriate choice of apparel for this, his first trip on an ocean liner. His eyes were small, his mouth very large, with a protruding upper lip, his ears outstanding like those of an animal, and his thin gray hair was parted in the middle and plastered down over a low, receding forehead. He spoke with an air of exceeding complacency, and it was his custom to pause frequently, between phrases, to purse out his upper lip, draw down the corners of his mouth, and distend his nostrils until he resembled nothing so much as a monkey. And just as that animal fixes its greedy eyes upon a coveted tidbit, he would fix his eyes upon his listener, awaiting a look or a word of approval before permitting further pearls to fall from

his lips, lest they should be unappreciated by the swine.

The swine were represented in this case by a young man apparently in the early twenties, a well-set-up boy in gray tweeds. His close-cropped hair was very blond, while his eyes, shadowed by long lashes several shades darker than his hair, were of that peculiar gray which changes at times, like sea water, to either blue or green. As he accepted the papers held out to him, his lips parted in an engaging grin which satisfied the man before him that he took positive pleasure in executing his commissions, and at the same time would have assured a keen observer that he derived the utmost delight from the contemplation of the other's absurdities. It was a distinct asset, that grin of Richard's, and as perfect a disguise for his actual thoughts and emotions as a comic mask would have been.

"All right, Robinson," he said cheerfully. "I'll look after everything. Don't worry. Good luck and good-by." He held out his hand.

"Wait a minute, Dickie," said a third voice, and a woman who had been standing a little apart now stepped forward and joined the two men at the head of the gangway.

Mrs. Robinson was considerably taller than her husband and of a more distinguished type. She was very slen-

der, and her head drooped under masses of waving gray hair. Her eyes were unusually large, dark brown and pathetic, like those of a cow, and she spoke with a hesitating, appealing sort of drawl, as if she recognized that she was but a helpless, clinging woman. This was her habitual attitude toward the boy, and it was invariably responded to by the same grin that answered so well in her husband's case. Plainly, humanity was a very comical and interesting spectacle to Richard Montgomery.

"Yes," he said now, addressing the woman with a gentle deference that was a partial excuse for her attitude toward him, since she was totally unfamiliar with the class of men who know of no other way of addressing women. "Yes, Alice?"

"I think I'd—er—better make certain that the luggage is in the state-room," broke in Robinson, with evident anxiety to escape further proximity to Richard. He remained long enough, however, to say, with a contemptuous glance about him, "Just look at the people! Did you ever see such cattle? Tourists—bah! Look at those old maids! School-teachers, I suppose, on a vacation. I'm not conceited, I hope, but, honestly, I don't think we look as commonplace and uninteresting as most people do—er—do you? Sometimes I can't help thinking, 'Thank God, I am not as other men!' Well—er—good-by, Dick. You'd better go ashore."

He tried to throw back his shoulders, but succeeded only in thrusting into greater prominence his fat little stomach, while the lines of his face fell naturally into their usual self-satisfied grimace as he pulled down his yachting cap so that it rested firmly on the tops of his winglike ears and strutted away.

As soon as he was out of earshot, the woman began again:

"Dickie——"

"Yes, Alice?"

"You'll surely come next week, won't you?"

"You bet I will! I can't start too soon."

"It does seem as if you might have arranged things some way——"

"Perfectly impossible, I assure you. I'm afraid I'll have to go, Alice."

"I wish you were coming with us."

"So do I. I'm crazy to get down there and try out the boat. She's a little beauty, Alice!"

"Is she? But I wish you were coming with us—with me, Dickie," and she leaned toward him a little and gazed soulfully into his eyes.

"Awfully nice of you," replied Richard absently, shifting a bit uneasily.

"I really have to go, Alice. Good-by."

The bugle sounded the warning, "All ashore," and the people began to scurry down the gangplank onto the dock, but Mrs. Robinson put out both of her hands and clung to the boy.

"Will you miss me, Dickie?" she asked pitifully.

"Of course," said he, with one eye on the gangway.

In the long shed of the pier, all the trucks stood empty. Already the men had taken their places at the hawsers, and already the larger part of that audience which always attends the departure of a great ship had passed through the shed and gathered at the far end of the open wharf. Richard glanced down at the upturned white faces and fluttering handkerchiefs and felt a momentary pang as he realized that he, too, must descend from the stage to take a place among the audience. The last man to leave the ship, besides himself, had already reached the gangway when, with one foot upon its downward path, he turned again to Alice, whose beseeching eyes still sought his own.

"My dear," he said gallantly, "how can you ask me? Good-by."

Then he dashed down the gangway,

and not a moment too soon, for as his foot quitted it, it was withdrawn from the ship.

He raced the entire length of the long shed to the open space at its end, where he wedged himself through the throng until he stood at the outer edge of the wharf, with a clear view of the boat and the East River before him.

It was a cool, crisp October day, and the air was exhilarating after the languorous heat of an Indian summer. The water was a silvery blue where it sparkled in the sunlight, and green, with a scum of dirty, gray-white foam, where it lapped against the piles of the dock. Far out in the distance, blue sky and water mingled in a shining silver haze, while, against the blue-green glitter and sheen of the nearer waters, the ship was a glare of white with yellow-ocher smokestacks.

Two tugs fussed about and took their positions with bustling importance. Just like two pompous little officials making ready to conduct a great orator onto his platform, the two little tugs prepared to conduct the great ship out into the river; and with appropriate aloofness and dignity, the vessel allowed herself to be towed, stern foremost, out of the dock and faced about. There was little shouting or noise of any kind, only a few quiet orders passed from deck to shore. The great cables were cast off and drawn aboard, the screw began to churn the water into fresh white foam about the stern, and the boat to move. It was all so momentous and yet so simple.

Men gazed across the slowly widening strip of water with faces stiffening into foolish grins and a furtive longing for the ending of the strain, while they wondered wistfully if it would look too callous if they should turn at once to go. Women gazed, some with excited laughter, some with pretended nonchalance, and some through tears, but each of them with a keen sense of the

dramatic value of parting and a secret wish that such sweet torment might be indefinitely prolonged.

Richard looked at the row of figures leaning over the rail, each one bearing a handkerchief, the universal emblem of parting—the group of spinsters with straggly hair and pathetically prim, expectant faces; the inevitable bride, with one hand tucked into the crook of her husband's elbow and the other tightly clasped around her telltale bouquet; a few blasé travelers, displaying weary, condescending interest and a cynical tolerance of others' show of enthusiasm; several unattached, sunburned men, with eyes full of grave or amused speculation; a sprinkling of calculating mammas with flirtatious daughters; and a cluster of rollicking schoolboys.

Richard envied each and all of them, even the pitiful little white-faced girl who stood all alone and waved her flutter of farewell to the crowd in general, instead of to some one in the crowd; for they were on the good ship *Santa Maria*, outward bound for the West Indies, Colon, and South America, while he was left on the shore. And yet it had taken weeks of skillful maneuvering on his part to bring this thing to pass, and nothing would have induced him to sail on the same boat with the Robinsons. Still, he did so long to begin the great adventure—actually to set in motion the wheels that he had been patiently oiling and adjusting for several years past.

The strip of water widened rapidly now, and the ship was no longer a part of the great world, but was herself a little world. With a proud realization of her freedom, she glided smoothly down the river, with a sort of challenging insolence, the sun glistening on her white sides as it glistens on the wings of a sea gull.

One by one or in little groups, the watchers left the dock, until Richard

stood alone, and the ship was only a white speck on the silver haze. Then he faced the bare gray pier once more and, as he passed through the dim, tunnellike shed, he drew a great sigh of relief. Suddenly he laughed—a happy little chuckle, like that of a schoolboy just released from school.

"Thank Heaven, that's over!" he said to himself.

He pulled out the papers that Robinson had given him and skimmed them hurriedly. As he did so, his cheerful grin faded, his eyes grew dark and cold as gray steel, his mouth set in a harsh line, while its corners turned downward, and one might see that he was not as young as he had at first appeared.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said Richard sternly. "The son of a gun!"

He thrust the papers back into his pocket, strode out of the place, and walked along the water front, with its row of slips on one side and grog shops on the other, until he turned up William Street. At first his face was grim and forbidding, and he looked almost old. But as his eyes traveled across the water, his thoughts followed them, and gradually his scowl faded, the furrows smoothed themselves out, and, by the time he reached Delmonico's old place, Richard was a boy again.

He settled himself comfortably at his usual table and gave a substantial order to his favorite waiter. It was his custom to lunch there whenever possible, for he loved the oldtime dignity and charm of the place. Now he took out the disturbing papers and pencil and began to calculate and, while he worked, his eyes became very serious and intent, and he screwed his mouth up into an adorable pucker and nibbled his pencil and scribbled away at a great rate, exactly like a small boy doing a sum on a slate.

At a table near by sat an elderly man—a man with iron-gray hair and beard

and smoldering dark eyes. He was eating in a dull, apathetic way, as if performing a distasteful duty, and while he ate, he watched the boy—at first abstractedly, then with amusement, and finally with a great wistfulness.

When food was placed before Richard, he ate with zest and sipped his wine with the delight of an epicure. At last nothing remained except a pot of black coffee—an extra large pot, supplied without request by an intelligent waiter familiar with his tastes. Then Richard lighted a cigarette and again picked up the papers, but this time he turned them over and, instead of checking up the lists already made, began to figure on their backs. Long columns of figures he set down and added and subtracted, multiplied and divided over and over again. His face was flushed with enthusiasm, his eyes were full of visions, and he was perfectly oblivious to everything else in the room.

"Jove! It can't be less than ten thousand a year—in two—or three years at most!" he said to himself. "And in five years—"

Glancing up with glowing eyes, he caught those of the other man fixed upon him.

"How terrible!" he thought with a sense of shock. "That old fellow hasn't a hope left in the world. He looks as if his soul had died years ago and his body were walking round all alone!"

At the same time, "How wonderful!" the older man was thinking. "There's a boy with his eyes full of dreams, and the whole world looks to him like a bazaar laid out for his pleasure—and he believes he's going to walk up and down with his pockets full of money and choose whatever he likes. Is it possible that I was ever like that?" He pondered a bit, still staring at Richard. "How did I come to lose it? I

hardly know myself—but Lord knows it's gone!"

Suddenly he rose and came toward the table where Richard sat. The young man watched him curiously.

"I beg your pardon," began the stranger, after a brief hesitation.

"Yes?" responded Richard, courteous, but cautious.

"You're a dreamer," said the man abruptly.

Richard gaped at him in amazement.

"I beg your pardon?" he exclaimed in his turn.

"I said," repeated the old man gently, "that you're a dreamer—and I just wanted to tell you to go on dreaming and you'll always be happy. Don't let ridicule or awakening or anything else stop you. So long as you have your dreams, you'll have something to fill your life—and there's nothing so terrible as emptiness. I know! You keep on dreaming, boy."

As abruptly as he had approached, he turned and walked away, with an air of calm indifference.

"By Jove, can I have been asleep?" thought Richard, rubbing his eyes.

He looked around quickly and saw the man, cold, correct, and unconcerned, seated at a table near by. He sought his eyes; there was no trace of recognition in them—nothing, in fact, but an infinite ennui.

"My word," thought Richard again, "I must have been asleep, you know, for it really can't have happened!" He sat musing a little longer and then went on, "Rum go! I fancy I'd better be careful, if my looks are as transparent as all that. Poor old chap! He must have had a bad knockout. Gad!" with a hasty glance at the watch on his wrist. "It's growing beastly late, and Betty'll be waiting to hear the news."

He began leisurely to gather up his papers.

"Cute little kid, Betty," he continued his reflections, "but I do wish they

weren't all so much alike. As soon as I get one trained to make me comfortable, she grows so insufferably sentimental that I have to find another in self-defense. I wonder what the devil's the matter with girls, anyway. Well, I'll soon be in the bush and far enough away from all of 'em to appreciate 'em better—perhaps."

He called the waiter, paid his score, and departed.

From Delmonico's he walked to the nearest subway entrance and took an uptown car to Twenty-third Street. He then made his way back by easy stages, stopping first at an old book shop—the lure that had drawn him thus far out of his way—next at a bootblack's, and then at a tobacconist's, and finally reaching his apartment, which overlooked Gramercy Park.

He let himself in with his latchkey and passed from his vestibule directly into his sitting room, a large, high-ceilinged room of beautiful and dignified proportions—such a room as can be found only in a stately old house. There are many old mansions in this section of New York which have been converted into lodging or apartment houses, and Richard had taken pains to secure a place in one of them, infinitely preferring his two spacious chambers and comfortable bath to the many cramped and cut-up rooms of a more modern apartment.

There were several long French windows in his sitting room, and a wide white marble fireplace, while the woodwork showed a mellow, time-tinted ivory white. The windows were hung with heavy curtains of dull-blue velour, which could be drawn together to shut out the light, and between two of them stood a solid old oak table, with a strip of blue brocade thrown over it, which served as a writing desk. At the back of the table, in the center, stood an antique bronze casket, and on either side of this rose a tall silver candlestick—

an arrangement that gave the whole an altarlike effect. A grand piano filled one corner of the room, and standing about at comfortable angles were several high-backed carved oak chairs. A tea table, equipped with a battered silver service, and a fine old console bearing decanters and glasses of rare Bohemian ware, completed the furnishings—except for an enormous divan that stretched along the whole of one side of the room, in Oriental fashion. It was heaped with soft blue cushions, and a girl was curled up there now with a novel in her hand. She was a little thing with fluffy yellow hair and big blue eyes, and she had made herself very comfortable and quite at home.

"Hello, Betty!" said Richard cheerily. "Been here long?"

"Not very. Did they get off all right?"

"They did. You ought to have seen Robinson. 'Twas as good as a circus. He had on a ready-made blue suit and a yachting cap, and he strutted up and down as if he owned the ship—like this, Betty," and Richard poked out his lip, distended his nostrils, and worked his face into a comical imitation of Robinson's self-satisfied smirk. "And my word, Betty, wait till you hear! Just as the boat was pulling out, he handed me a paper.

"Here," he said, 'I forgot these few things. Kindly look after 'em for me.'

"Then he made a quick get-away, and the old tub pulled out before I had a chance to look. And Jove, honey, wait till you see that list! There are three solid sheets of stuff to buy—everything from a telescope to a box of tacks—and only a week to do it in—and the boat to look after besides. Here it is. How I'm ever going to get it done is more than I know."

"I'll help you," said the girl, and she sat up cross-legged, like a little Turk, and began to go over the list. "Good heavens, Dick, why did you let him

string you like this? Didn't he do anything himself?"

"Apparently not. Couldn't help it—the boat pulled out before I had time to get a look at the thing. Not a cent of money did he give me—and I've just about enough left for my ticket!"

"I wouldn't do it! It's a shame! Let the stuff go. Weren't you furious? I'd have felt like scratching his eyes out!"

"Well, I was peeved at first, but I'm so glad to get started that nothing matters very long. I've got to do it, Betty. Good Lord, honey, the thing's got to go through now! I've put in every cent I possess, and sold about everything I own, and borrowed more than I can make in two years, to put it through, and I've worked my heart out for several years to get it started. I can't balk at a little extra bother now. Don't you worry. I'm going to get it all back ten times over—and I'm going to sail away on a great, big ship just one week from to-day—and, Lord, Betty, but I'm glad!" and he flung himself down on the couch beside her, with his head snuggled boyishly into her lap.

"I'll help you, Dick. I can buy a lot of the things for you—and help pack up here."

"Oh, will you?" asked Richard happily, giving her a little hug. "But, I say, it's a beastly long way for you to go back and forth. Why don't you stay here this week? I'll run out with you to-night, and you can get some things and come back and stay till I go."

"I've got an awful lot to do. Seitz says he'll refuse to teach me if I don't keep up my practice better. And I said the last time that I wouldn't stay again. But since you're going away—I don't suppose I could do much work, anyway. Do you really want me to?"

"Sure—why not? We'll have great larks—in spite of the damn' list."

"All right," answered the girl.

"Come on—let's go after my things and get back in time for dinner."

With much laughter, they made ready and started.

After a couple of hours, they returned in high spirits, bringing with them, besides a suit case, sundry bottles and parcels. Amid gales of laughter, they cleared the tea table and spread a white cloth over it, opened the packages, arranged the delicacies, and at length sat down to a satisfactory repast.

"You're an awfully good sport, Betty dear," said Richard presently, as he sat back in his comfortable armchair, with a cup of good coffee at his elbow and a good cigar between his fingers.

"Am I?" asked Betty happily.

She brought a stool and came to sit at his feet, and Richard surveyed her tolerantly and now and again touched her hair caressingly, while he sketched in glowing terms his hopes and plans.

"Jove, Betty," he concluded, "but it'll be great to get into the tropics again! And think of the money I'll make!"

"I wish I were going, too," ventured the girl timidly.

"Wish you were," said Richard cheerfully, "but don't worry. We'll have splendid times when I come back, and it won't be long—not more than a year, anyway. I say, Betty, it's growing awfully late, and we've a lot to do to-morrow."

"All right, Dick. Er—where do you want me to sleep?"

"Oh, take my room as usual, and I'll bunk on the divan. I often sleep there anyway, you know."

"Good night, Dick."

"Night, honey. Oh, but, I say, aren't you going to play a little first?"

"If you like." She crossed to the piano and sat down. "What shall I play?"

"Whatever you feel like."

By the merest coincidence, she felt

like playing several of his favorite selections, and, although she looked like a doll, Betty could play. At the end of half an hour, Richard strolled over to stand behind the girl and, when she paused at last with fingers resting idly on the keys, he put his arms about her.

"I say, Betty," he said tenderly, "if you could only keep on playing all the time, I could almost learn to love you—but you always stop, you know," he added hastily.

Somewhat impatiently, Betty drew herself away from him.

Richard smiled and then, with a quick change, he eliminated the personal, which was always, with him, the superficial element, and became altogether serious, with his attention fixed not upon her, but upon her possibilities.

"Betty," he said, putting an affectionate hand upon her shoulder, "you'll work hard while I'm away, won't you? You're getting on splendidly this year, and I do want you to succeed."

But women rarely forget themselves in their interests.

"Why?" demanded Betty abruptly.

Richard met her attempt with a look of stern surprise. One of the elusive qualities that made Richard the haunting, not quite human creature that he was was the combination in him of almost superfeminine intuitions and supremely masculine points of view, so that he translated woman unerringly, but without comprehension—forever mastered them with his knowledge and forever hurt them with his misunderstanding. A feminine point of view was to him perfectly plain, but a mistake that in kindness should be corrected; and Richard was perfectly sincere, and sometimes positively quixotic, in the pains that he took to perform this service for any woman who interested him.

"Why, because you have a brilliant future in store. You have it in you to do something big with your music,

Betty," he explained patiently. "You want to, don't you?"

"I want to please you," persisted the girl with defiance.

"That's very nice of you, honey, and I'm awfully proud of you, but the really important thing is not to please me, but to develop your splendid gift—for yourself. If you'd never known me, you would surely have wanted to do that, wouldn't you, Betty?" Richard spoke anxiously. It always hurt him to find that the truth was not what he thought it ought to be.

But Betty was obdurate.

"I don't know," she replied. "Girls don't usually care about doing things just for the sake of the thing—the way men do. If we do anything big, it's pretty apt to be because some man wants us to. I loved my music, but I never thought about making a career out of it—or realized that I could—until you came. And I didn't have any way to do it, even if I had wanted to. But you praised and encouraged me, and then you took me to Seitz and paid for my lessons and pushed me so far—Oh, you've done everything for me, Dick, and I'm grateful—so—so much more than grateful! But what's it for? Why have you put your money and your brain and your time into educating me?"

"Why, because, Betty, I like to. You have an unusual amount of talent—and one of the most interesting things in the world, to me, is to help interesting people. I have no particular talent myself, but I've always had a sort of gift for recognizing it in other people, and I love to bring it out. It gives me something to dream about. It's like seeing a new country and dreaming about exploring it—and then finding rich resources and dreaming about developing them. Don't you see, little girl?"

"But, Dick, are only things and qual-

ities big enough to dream about? Can't you ever dream about—just people?"

"Well—not just about people. But the 'things and qualities'"—he repeated her definition of the abstract with gentle banter—"are found only in certain people." So far he indulged her.

Betty was no logician; she felt sophistry somewhere in his soothing, but was unable to probe it with argument.

"I don't see how you can be—what you are," she said at last with pathetic helplessness, "but I guess—that's what you are. You're always the same."

Richard laughed. Then, "I'm sorry," he said coaxingly. "But you've always known. I've never pretended to be different—and I have tried to make you happy, dear."

"Oh, Dick, that's the trouble! You've made me happier than any one else in the world."

"But, then, Betty, what—"

"And you've wanted me to—to—stay here with you sometimes?"

"Of course, child. You're so pretty, and we have such good times. But it was never a price, Betty. You wanted to stay. I never asked you to do anything you didn't want to, did I, dear?"

"No, Dick. It's true I wanted to stay. I almost made you ask me—I know that."

"And it's never hurt you—and you've been happy—and you've got on with your work, the big thing, a little better for knowing me—perhaps?"

"Yes, Dick, that's all true."

"Well, then, Betty?"

"Don't you see, Dick—can't you see that—that you haven't any right to make people happy if you can't make them happy enough?"

"No, Betty," answered Richard seriously, "that's a thing I never can see. Would you refuse a hungry man a slice of bread because you happened not to have a loaf?"

"No. You're not wrong—and neither am I. What is?"

"Betty, I've tried to be happy—and have been—but I've never voluntarily harmed any one, and I've honestly tried to make every one around me happy, too. And you tell me that, with you, I've succeeded. Others have told me the same thing—and yet they've all seemed sad. I admit it. I've tried to find out myself where the trouble lies. I think it's this: Women seem to have an idea that happiness must be eternal and always the same thing—a straight thread dangling from heaven. It isn't; it's a chain, made up of alternating links of joy and the reverse. It's only by comparison that happiness can exist; otherwise there would be nothing but monotony. But women are so frightened at the first dark link that they daren't go on to the next light one. I can't help that, Betty, but I'm trying to show you—can't you see? You and I can't go on forever, of course, but our stopping makes the next link possible. Something new will always make happiness for you, if you don't get frightened and stand still. All any one can do, Betty, is to make one link bright and then make way for the next—isn't it so?"

"It's—it's way beyond me, Dick. I only know that—that I'm very miserable because you're going away."

"But I'm here to-night."

"Yes," assented Betty wearily.

"And it's beastly late, and you're nervous and tired. Come—philosophy doesn't quite fit into you, Betty, but you're charming as you are. Cunning darling!" he added fervently, as he opened the door into the next room and drew her inside.

CHAPTER II.

The next morning, they went over the list carefully and then set to work. Every day, during the week that followed, they toiled like Trojans, shopping all day and sorting, arranging, and

packing Richard's things in the evening. The girl was a tremendous help, and Richard was glad to have her there, except on the occasions when she grew sentimental over his departure or demanded caresses while he was full of interest in catalogues. Fortunately they were so busy that there was no opportunity for frequent recurrences of such occasions, and on the whole they had a good time together.

As they packed, Richard would pick out first one and then another of his treasures.

"Here, take this, Betty," he would say. "You always liked it, and Lord knows when I'll ever want to use the stuff again! Most of it's going to be sold, anyway."

And Betty would answer:

"Oh, thank you, Dick. If you ever want it back, just say so. It certainly will look well in my studio."

At last the final evening arrived. The once cozy rooms were stripped almost bare; only a few necessary pieces of furniture remained. Packing boxes stood everywhere; the piano was gone, and a trunk, already strapped and surmounted by an open portmanteau, occupied its place.

"Well," said Richard, "I fancy everything's ready at last, and, Jove, but I'm tired! Let's go to bed."

"All right," replied Betty. "I'm tired myself. Good night, Dick."

"Good night, Betty."

"Are—are you coming in to tell me good night?" asked Betty shyly and with averted eyes.

"Of course, dear," answered Richard, yawning prodigiously.

"It's been nice to be here with you, Dick. I hate to see you go."

"It's been ripping to have you here. I don't know what I should have done without you. I'm certainly crazy to get down there, Betty. I'm as excited as a kid the night before Christmas!" Richard threw himself down on the

divan and blinked at her happily, like a sleepy little boy.

"We've had a busy week, haven't we?"

"Uhm-uhm," he answered drowsily. "You must be awfully tired, Betty. Poor little girl, I've worked you to death."

"I'm not so very sleepy, though."

There was no answer.

"This is my last night with you, Dick."

"Uhm-uhm," he murmured faintly. His eyes were closed, and his breath came regularly.

"You're awfully sleepy, aren't you, Dick?"

The sound of deep, rhythmic breathing was her only reply.

"Dick," then said Betty plaintively.

She waited a moment uncertainly, then turned and left the room, closing the door very gently behind her—for Richard was fast asleep.

The next day, at noon, Betty accompanied Richard to the dock. Everything looked exactly as it had the week before. Even the audience appeared to be made up of the same faces. The vessel looked the same, although she bore another name. Richard took the girl on board and showed her his cabin, while he carefully disposed his hand luggage in the most accessible places. Then he returned with her to the wharf, and they stood together at the foot of the gangway, awaiting the final bugle call, which would summon all passengers on board.

From where they stood, they could see the cranes lift the boat of which Richard spoke so often and deposit her gently on the deck of the steamer. This meant that the hour of departure was at hand, for the other cargo had all to be stowed below, and the hatches closed, before the yacht could be placed over them. Richard heaved a sigh of relief when he saw that the object of

his affection and solicitude was safe on board.

"Oh, by the way, Betty," he said casually, now that his mind was at rest, "I told the expressman to take that box of music over to your place. I thought you might be able to use it while I'm away."

"Dick dear, how awfully good of you to think of me—when you've had so much to look after, too!" exclaimed the girl, quite overwhelmed.

"I like to do little things for you when I can, dear," said the boy affectionately, and with so much modest depreciation of his thoughtfulness that he created an impression of having gone far out of his way to perform a difficult service, and Betty entirely forgot that she herself had sorted and packed the music and had even called up the expressman, so that there had remained nothing for Richard to do except give his directions to the carrier.

There followed a moment of silence, and then, "Dick," began the girl, a little timidly.

"Yes, Betty?" answered Richard with gentle deference, for he knew no other way of addressing women except when he was very angry.

"You'll surely come back in six months—or less than a year, anyway?"

"You bet I will! Everything'll be under way then, and I'll be ready for a good vacation."

"Did you really have to go 'way down there yourself? It does seem as if you might have arranged things—"

"Perfectly impossible, I assure you. I'm afraid I'll have to go, Betty."

"I wish I could go with you."

"So do I. I'm crazy to get down there—and to try out the boat. She's such a beauty, Betty!"

"Is she? But I do wish I could go, too—with you, Dick," and she leaned toward him a little and gazed wistfully into his eyes.

"Awfully nice of you," replied Richard absently, and shifted a bit uneasily. "I really have to go, Betty. Good-by."

The bugle sounded the warning, "All ashore," and people began to scurry down the gangplank onto the dock, but Betty put out both of her little hands and clung to the boy.

"Will you miss me, Dick?" she asked pitifully.

"Of course," said he, with one eye on the gangway.

The last man to leave the ship had already reached its center when, with one foot upon its upward path, Richard turned again to Betty, whose pleading eyes still sought his own.

"Dear," he said gallantly, "how can you ask me? Good-by."

Then he dashed up the gangway—and not a moment too soon, for as his foot quitted it, it was withdrawn from the ship.

"Partings are so infernally alike!" reflected Richard, as he lounged against the rail, looking down into the host of upturned faces. "I wonder why people make such a fuss about 'em—and I wonder if there'll ever be anybody that I'll really hate to leave. I'm afraid the most beautiful woman on earth wouldn't stand much show if I was putting out to sea."

Majestically the great ship permitted herself to be drawn out into the river and faced about, and soon she, as her sister ship had been the week before, was outward bound for the West Indies, Colon, and South America.

Betty stood on the wharf, waving her handkerchief and straining her tear-filled eyes in the effort to distinguish Richard's face among a multitude of fast-vanishing faces, until the boat was out of sight.

Richard flew his flag of farewell also, waving his big white handkerchief—at first cheerfully, then mechanically, and finally not at all; for his eyes were fixed on New York's receding sky line, and

he was breathing in great drafts of sea air and grinning boyishly as he said to himself:

"Thank Heaven, that's over, and I'm actually on my way!"

After three years of patient and persistent endeavor, and after enduring countless delays and disappointments, Richard had at last succeeded in carrying out his long-cherished plan of organizing a company for the exploitation of placer claims along one of the innumerable South American rivers emptying into the Pacific Ocean. Because the particular river in which he was interested happened to be located in Colombia, and because Colombia—although the richest of all South American countries in undeveloped natural resources—bears an evil reputation, due to its trying climatic conditions and to its frequent political disturbances, and also because it is, as yet, an almost unknown country—large tracts of it having never been explored—for these reasons, it had been exceedingly difficult for Richard to interest conservative capitalists in his proposition, in spite of its undeniable possibilities. That is why he had been forced to take what offered, and had finally associated himself with Robinson, a man whom he thoroughly disliked personally, but whose friends had been willing to put up money enough to finance the project.

In the company thus formed, Richard and Robinson held each an equal number of shares, and both were now being sent by that company to begin operations on the claims. Richard's adventurous spirit, combined with his enthusiasm and confidence in his plans, had made him eager to go; and his knowledge, both of mining and of the country in question, had made the firm more than glad to accept his offer.

As for Robinson, he had had his own reasons for wishing to leave New York and had, therefore, induced his bank-

ers to send him as their personal representative. In this capacity, he had begun immediately to assume a position of authority over Richard, who already realized that their association was a most unfortunate one. It was too late, however, to change matters, and Richard was so elated over the consummation of his efforts and the brilliancy of his prospects that he found it comparatively easy to overlook many disagreeable features for the present—especially as the antics of Robinson afforded him constant amusement.

In order to facilitate the transport of supplies between Panama and the property, and also as the best means of providing decent and sanitary accommodation for the men sent down, the company had decided to buy a small cruising yacht which could be transported to Colon by steamer, transferred across the Isthmus on flat cars—for this was in the year 1911 and the great canal had not yet been opened—and then taken down the west coast under her own power.

This was a detail of the business in which Richard had taken keen delight, for he loved boats and everything connected with them. He had selected the yacht himself—a well-equipped sixty-foot gasoline cruiser—and had ordered her coppered and put into perfect condition for her work in tropical waters. He had smiled quietly and had made no comment upon learning that Robinson had included a very gorgeous sailing master's uniform in the outfit that he had acquired at the company's expense for the expedition; for Richard happened to know that not only was Robinson totally ignorant of navigation and of all else pertaining to boats, but that he had an abject fear of them as well and avoided traveling by water whenever possible.

Robinson, in his eagerness to get away, had made business to be attended to in Panama an excuse for departing

at once, and Richard had remained in New York, ostensibly to await the completion of repairs and to superintend the shipping of the yacht, but in reality because of his determination not to sail on the same ship with the Robinsons. His relations with them had been growing decidedly strained. Alice had presumed upon a flirtatious gallantry, which she had urgently invited, until she had become a positive bore, and Richard had had more than enough of companionship with her husband. Now, however, he put all these complications out of his mind and, as they steamed along, he was filled with a great content.

The trip was an uneventful one. The sun shone day after day, and the air grew warmer and warmer as they journeyed southward. The water rippled and sparkled, breaking into dazzling white foam about the bow and turning from gray-blue to a marvelous sapphire as they entered the Caribbean. Nor was there any sense of isolation, for this was an ocean thoroughfare and, daily, ships of every description, from giant liners to tiny fishing smacks, passed and hailed them. Often, too, they caught sight of some beautiful island, coquetting in pale green and amethyst behind a veil of silver haze.

There were several young officers on board—returning to their post on the Isthmus after a six-weeks' furlough at home—who drew Richard into their circle, and with them he passed many merry hours, drinking, smoking, gambling, or simply talking, after the careless, carefree manner of men, so incomprehensible to women.

There was also one other traveler who attracted Richard's attention the first day out—a man who, little as either of them imagined it at the time, was destined to play a surprising part in Richard's later career. This was Monsieur Guy de Cartier, a big, handsome, black-eyed fellow somewhere in

the forties—a Frenchman by birth, a citizen of the world by profession, for he spent his time and money, of which he had an abundance, in organizing wild expeditions and seeking out adventures in little-known parts of the earth. Now he was on his way to South America and, although he did not say so, Richard came to believe that he had been intrusted with some secret mission by the French government.

He was like Richard in that he had a lazy, indifferently gallant manner, but unlike him in that he never left one in doubt as to whether or not fire burned beneath his cool exterior. It was plain that in him were combined elemental passions with highly civilized manners and conventional habits of thought, resulting from careful training and superb self-control. The two men had much in common and took a strong liking to each other during their first chance meeting, and many were the hours they spent together, talking, for the most part, of world politics or of adventure, while Richard found ever-increasing interest in the study of the fascinating forces discernible in the character of the older man.

Of the other passengers, Richard took little notice beyond a courteous good morning, although both the calculating mamas and the flirtatious daughters showed every inclination to smile in friendly fashion whenever he passed by, looking especially fresh and boyish, with his bare, blond head and immaculate white flannels. But he was tired of girls and paid them scant attention, while the half-cynical droop at the corners of his mouth gave evidence that he did not overlook their advances. It was a genuine mystery to Richard why people should so frequently show him consideration when he showed none for them. While he was arrogant, he was not conceited, and while he was aware that most of the mortals with whom he came in contact offered very little en-

ticement for research, it did not occur to him that he held within himself the quality that they lacked.

Some part of each day the boy reserved for himself. Then he would sit alone, lounging comfortably in his long steamer chair, often (with eyes half closed so that he presented an appearance of drowsiness which discouraged intrusion, and, lying thus, he would dream as he watched the sea.

Sometimes his dreams were of the things he meant to do and of the promising hopes and plans that had led him to take this trip. Often, they were hopes and plans for Betty, or for other of the protégés of his brain, for Richard had spoken the truth when he had told Betty that one of his greatest joys was to develop genius in others.

But oftenest of all, just now, his dreams were not about any one at all, but were vague visions of space and freedom and fulfillment, fleeting memories of former lives lived upon the sea, filmy, fugitive fancies that drifted out over the water and into dim distances, like birds flying into the mist.

One of the many conversations that took place between Richard and Monsieur de Cartier during this voyage was significant in its relation to after events, although, at the time, it seemed unimportant enough. It was a brilliant, hot night. Most of the passengers had gone below, but the two men lingered over their final cigars. The sea was calm, and the ship steamed along steadily and smoothly, trailing her wake of foam like a lady dragging her skirts across a ballroom floor.

There is a sympathy, a protecting and admiring camaraderie, a thrilling unity, in the companionship of two such men as Richard and Guy de Cartier that exists in no other relationship. The compatibility of the knowledge, experience, temperaments, and traditions of two men of the world—whatever their nationalities may be—makes possible

between them a flowing speech full of subtleties, empty of explanations, comprehensible to all of their own brotherhood, and unintelligible to outsiders. The compliments and stabs that two such men can give each other are keener than those that can be given to them by any woman, and when there is a disparity in their years, the vanity of the younger is flattered by the companionship of the older.

The talk, upon this occasion, began with a discussion of South American politics. The possibility of patching up the border quarrels between Colombia and Peru was a subject that interested Richard, and Monsieur de Cartier was an authority on such matters. From this, they fell to epigramming the characteristics of the different republics and their inhabitants, thus drifting into an exchange of opinion about South American women, and finally settling—as is not infrequently the case when two men sit long together—upon the eternal topic, woman. Arrived there, they amused themselves for some time with brilliant, but superficial, persiflage. As the night wore on, however, they became less witty and more confidential.

"I have noticed," said De Cartier at length, "that you seem not at all intrigued by the charms of *les dames* whom we have at present with us. It is true that there are none among them who understand the art of coquetry. It is not beauty that we desire in women so much as the exquisite finish which understands how to create and preserve the glamour of mystery. American women are beautiful, but the art of love—which is to love what the toilet is to the woman—they comprehend not at all."

"To tell the truth," responded Richard slowly, "I'm trying—I don't suppose I'll succeed—but I'd like to get altogether away from women for a while. There's been too many of 'em in my life already."

De Cartier laughed, but with a tinge of bitterness.

"There are always too many women in a man's life," he said. "Still, they are undoubtedly delightful—and a compensation."

"There are other things—outside of women—that I want to do some time," went on Richard boyishly, "that I mean to do. I've started once or twice, but, every time, some woman has been in the way. Some one of them's always there. One day I'm going to stand alone, and then——"

"And then?"

"Every man has his dreams."

A simple sentence, rather awkwardly spoken, for Richard was as nearly embarrassed as it was possible for him to be, and yet De Cartier, looking into his shining eyes, did not wonder that some woman was "always there." For Richard, who tried, so hard to guard himself within himself, was one of those rare individuals through whom one sees the cosmic. He was so much greater than the things he said and did that commonplace actions became, with him, symbolic. Like a marble faun in an ancient garden, he was, without volition, reminiscent of the joy and pathos and the fresh surge of life in the by-gone youth of the world. He brought to men and women alike the melancholy of memories more beautiful than things that are, and they loved him as one loves poetry, without understanding why. Richard was indeed a poet, but one who scattered his songs in the hearts of his friends, instead of publishing them.

"Ah, boy," said De Cartier, with an abandon to sentiment that only a Frenchman could have managed gracefully, "how women must love you—and how you must make them suffer!"

"Nonsense!" retorted Richard, abashed by the expression of what he knew, in his heart, to be true.

"Ah yes! You will never sacrifice

your dreams, while I—I am a Frenchman and I can not escape my traditions. When I love—I love! How I should like to know what you are doing—what you are—some years from now!"

"Perhaps you will—why not?"

"To—what you call 'keep track' of any one, that is an abomination, but with wanderers like us, the future is full of glorious possibilities—and no certainties. That is what makes the glory. I have an intuition, Monsieur Montgomery, that our paths will cross once more."

"I hope so," replied Richard, with ready courtesy, and rose from his chair, for it was almost morning.

During the two days between Jamaica and Colon, the skies grew gray, mists gathered, and the air became murky and oppressive. It was intensely hot. Moisture and mold collected everywhere, and a drizzling rain began to fall. By the time they sighted Colon, toward evening of the seventh day out of New York, the drizzle had become a downpour, and Richard's first and lasting impression of Colon was that of a gray town set on a mud flat, made up of dirty, gray frame structures straggling along a single street; in the distance Cristobal—more gray houses set among tall, gray-trunked palms that looked like inverted feather dusters; and all this seen through sheets of gray rain.

Richard said a cordial good-by to De Cartier, who was remaining on the steamer, landed, and made quick work of the customs, found that it was too late to unload the yacht that night, and so drove to the Washington Hotel. There he called up Robinson, who was stopping at the Tivoli at Ancon, just outside of Panama City, and informed him that he had arrived and that he would be over some time the next day.

He dressed, enjoyed an excellent, if solitary, dinner, and was about to turn

in when he was called to the telephone. He found Alice at the other end of the wire, and was forced to listen to repeated inquiries after his health and general well-being and to receive protestations of joy in his arrival and assurances of welcome that kept him standing for half an hour and left him wearied beyond measure, so that he fell asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow.

CHAPTER III.

Very early the next morning, Richard drove to the dock. The yacht was of necessity the first of the cargo to be taken off the steamer, since the forward hatches could not be opened until after her removal. Two flat cars were waiting on the wharf alongside the ship, and the boat was lifted by cranes directly from the deck onto the cars.

Richard waited long enough to see that everything was in readiness for the transfer to Balboa, the Pacific port and western terminal of the canal, and then he was free to proceed to Panama. He found, however, that he had missed both morning trains and would in consequence have to put off his departure until late in the afternoon. He therefore returned to his hotel and, adapting himself at once to a Panamanian custom that accorded well with his own inclination, passed the midday hours in the enjoyment of a substantial *déjeuner*, followed by a long siesta.

At four o'clock, his train left for Panama, and he found the journey, which lasted nearly three hours, full of interest.

The railroad tracks passed through the Isthmus like a long street passing through a straggling village, for the government towns were never far apart and all looked alike, each one of them consisting of groups of the typical white-framed, screened and galieried, square tropical houses; each pos-

sessing a post office, a commissary store, and a station; each surrounded by a fringe of tumbledown negro shacks and picturesque bamboo and palm-thatched native huts; each with its line of saloons, Chinese booths, and open markets, where the patient pack ponies were relieved of their burdens of native produce; and each with its big corral, where riding ponies and huge army mules lived together in friendly fashion.

The country itself was one of rolling hills, dense forests, and beautiful, mysterious, fever-laden swamps. Sometimes the train whizzed through jungle so thick that it formed a solid wall of green on either side of the tracks; sometimes it crept and crawled over marshes, where one could almost feel the rails sink deeper and deeper into black ooze, as the heavy train passed over them, and where dead trees stood covered with gorgeous orchids—purple and orange, yellow, crimson, and white—like corpses bedecked with flowers.

Often, too, Richard caught glimpses of the great canal, then rapidly nearing completion. In one place, he saw stupendous walls and piles of masonry, which were the Gatun locks and dam, and later he crossed a long trestle from which he could look straight down for eighty feet into the ditch itself and could see, on the one hand, the end of the famous Culebra Cut and, on the other, the beginning of the locks of Pedro Miguel. Sometimes they crossed the course of the old French canal, and he saw whole rows of wonderful machinery, standing forsaken and forlorn, covered with rust and overgrown with creepers, just where it had been deserted by the debonair French engineers, who, when they found it impossible to continue their work, gave a great banquet in De Lesseps' palace and then walked straight from the table to their ship, leaving the remnants of the feast, together with the plates

and empty glasses, for the negroes, who looted the place as soon as their masters had departed.

The way, too, was enlivened by innumerable incidents. At Matachin—so named because there three hundred Chinamen once hanged themselves by their queues before the doors of their masters, rather than submit to unsatisfactory conditions—several small brown boys came through the train, offering for sale gorgeous bouquets made up of a dozen different kinds of flowers of as many colors—bouquets that had a quaint and distinctive charm of their own. Richard impulsively bought one of them with the intention of presenting it to Alice, but later reflected that the gift would call forth a shower of gratitude out of all proportion to its value and disconcerting to listen to, and so threw the flowers hastily out of the open window, then glancing furtively about to see if his action had been noticed.

The train was nearing a village when the whistles blew at five o'clock, and as they passed through it, Richard saw swarms of men hurrying home from work—white men in khaki, negroes in tattered clothing of all kinds, Spaniards with scarlet sashes and velvet tam-o'-shanters, and soft-eyed, bearded coolies, with huge white or scarlet turbans bound about their heads. When the train stopped at the next station, he saw one of the labor trains—a string of open cattle cars, provided with lengthwise seats—belch forth an army of laborers, white, brown, and black. Further on still, he saw a pathetic little procession—several orderlies bearing two stretchers, covered over with sheets and followed by a number of weeping negresses with children clinging to their hands. At the same time, he heard the thunderous cannonade of the blasting in "the cut" and was reminded that here was a veritable army engaged in a great war with nature—a

war that did not fail to take its daily toll of lives.

He was diverted also, from time to time, by the conversation of several tourists, which was carried on so audibly that he could not avoid overhearing much of it. He smiled in quiet appreciation as one woman said to another:

"Yes, my dear, I'm going all the way down to Santa Marta, instead of spending the week here. We have twenty-four hours, anyway—time enough to go over the canal. I have to do that, because I promised to give a lecture on Panama and the canal before our Home Study Club, when I get back."

And he almost chuckled aloud when her friend cried gushingly, as she raised her lorgnette to gaze with reverence upon a small locomotive crane, which they were at that moment passing:

"Look quick, dearie! There's one of those marvelous steam shovels we read so much about."

This was the "wet season," which lasts from April until January and during which rain falls intermittently every day. On some days, the sky will be altogether gray and overcast, and the downpour will last from morning until night, the interludes taking the form of terrific thunder showers, which, instead of clearing, simply relapse into steady, dreary downfall once more. But on other days, the showers will be interspersed with bursts of dazzling sunshine and for a little space the whole outdoors will be a-glitter and a-sparkle with rainbows—in the sky, in the pools of water on the streets, in the trickles from the eaves, and in the drops on trees and grass; and then, within the hour, everything will be as dry as if it had not rained for days.

Thus it was that Richard left Colon in sunshine, following morning rains; passed through the emerald green of

the jungle during a golden afternoon; caught the glare of white concrete and paint under the last bright rays of the sun; saw lights shining clear through the velvety blackness that followed the sunset with no twilight between; watched the lights grow dim behind a veil of mist; and finally entered Panama in the midst of a driving rain. So his first impression of that city was one of sounds rather than of sights—a tooting of engine whistles, a clank of closing gates, a banging of luggage, and a babel of voices, the clanging of innumerable *coche* bells and the clatter of hoofs. Then a blaze of light broke suddenly through the rain and darkness. This was the Tivoli Hotel, and the second stage of his journey was over.

In the hall, he was met by Alice Robinson, who had been standing near the door ever since the whistle had announced the arrival of the evening train. She fell upon him, as he entered, and greeted him with such fervor that several of the bystanders exchanged knowing glances, which were not lost upon Richard and which caused him not a little discomfort.

While he signed the register and engaged a room, she hovered about him with an air of proprietorship, and as they followed the porter up one of the broad stairways and down the long corridor, she clung to his arm, murmuring over and over, "Are you glad to be here? Are you glad to see me again?" until Richard wished he could shut her off as one does a phonograph, and then laughed to himself at the fancy.

In his own room, Richard attended to the disposal of his luggage and dismissed the porter with a satisfactory tip. Then, in spite of Alice's obvious desire for a short tête-à-tête, he stepped into the corridor and waited there, with one hand against the door, so that she was forced to pass out and lead the way to the chamber, on the same floor, which she occupied with her husband.

Robinson awaited him there and received him somewhat after the manner of a king giving audience to a vassal. He was pompously glad that Richard had arrived at the appointed time. He inquired minutely and unintelligently after the boat, tossed the boy a casual thanks upon hearing that his list of commissions had been gone over and attended to, and at length suggested that they have a drink.

While he poured the liquor, he pulled Richard aside long enough to ask in a whisper:

"Did you—er—have any trouble at the office—er—about money for the things?"

"Well," came the reply, also in an undertone, "the blighters were a bit dubious at first—wanted to see the list and said they thought you'd got some of the stuff before—but finally told me to go ahead."

To Richard's surprise, a look of intense relief passed over the other man's face, and he caught his breath as one does at the end of a crisis.

For the rest of the evening, Robinson talked incessantly and with even more than his usual complacency, while Richard listened with an amusement marred by the knowledge that he had here no audience before whom, later, he could imitate the other's conversation; for ridicule was one of Richard's delights and mimicry one of his talents.

"I think," said Robinson at length, "that it would be a good plan for you to teach me Spanish, Dick."

"Me, too, Dickie," broke in Alice quickly.

"It'll be a week at least," went on Robinson, "before we're ready to start down the coast. I could pick it up in the meantime, I reckon, and it might come in handy with the natives down there. Spanish is their language, isn't it?"

"It is," replied Richard gravely, "and I'll be glad to teach you, but I'm afraid

there won't be much time. There's a lot to do, you know."

"Oh, well, it won't take long. I've seen a book advertised—'Spanish in a Week.' It might be a help. Wonder if we could get it here."

"As well here as anywhere, I fancy," replied the boy, and received an aggrieved look from Alice, whose perceptions were somewhat keener than those of her husband.

"Might as well fill up our time," continued Robinson, who stood with his hands in his pockets, rocking back and forth from his heels to his toes and at the same time contemplating his image in the pier glass opposite him. "It might be a good thing to know. Er—Dick, are the girls in Colombia pretty?"

"Ugly as sin, usually."

"Oh, really?"

"Sure thing. The beautiful señoritas you read about, with lace mantillas and flowers in their hair, don't exist down there—at least I never saw one. And they mostly wear red calico tied about their middle, a few strings of beads, and a smile. Did you say you'd like to learn Spanish?"

"Er—well, of course—if there's time— But if you're too busy—"

"Not at all," responded Richard politely.

"Well, we'll see. Now about the boat. Of course you'll get her launched to-morrow?"

"Have you made any arrangements at Balboa?"

"Well—er—no, but—"

"Then we can't launch her to-morrow. They'll have to build a runway and— Where's Barnes?"

"Stopping down at the Metropole. Couldn't afford to keep him here, of course. I told him to come up to see you in the morning."

"I'll talk it over with him."

"But—er—you see, it's like this—"

Robinson proceeded to give Richard

his instructions. He began by asserting, with exaggerated humility, that he lacked sufficient knowledge of boats to undertake to superintend the launching and outfitting of the yacht, and concluded by telling, in elaborate and ludicrous detail, with frequent pauses and grimaces indicating his desire for appreciation, exactly how such things should be done.

To all of his suggestions Richard acquiesced good-naturedly, but with mental reservations. He would have been thoroughly unwilling to intrust the care of the precious boat to another than himself and intended to use his own discretion in all matters pertaining to it. He made travel weariness an excuse for retiring early and escaped at last, but not without a final word from Alice, who followed him to the door and stepped into the corridor long enough to say again:

"Are you very glad to be here, Dickie?"

And Dickie replied, with one of his most comprehensive grins:

"How can you ask, Alice? Good night."

"I'll be down in the bush and well out of her clutches in a few days, so there's no object in kicking up a row now."

Thus Richard shrugged away the unwelcome presence of Alice, and then drifted away into dreamland, wondering whether he should buy a schooner yacht or go to Egypt, after he had made his pile out of the Colombian proposition.

He awoke at noon the next day, feeling perfectly fit and eager to seize whatever Panama had to offer him. By way of beginning, he stretched himself luxuriously and looked about. His room was large, and bright with sunlight, for the skies had cleared during the night, and the rain-soaked earth now lay steaming under a fierce tropical glare. It was insufferably hot, and the air was heavy with moisture, but

Richard was so happy to be there that, for the moment, he was impervious to discomfort. His eyes roved about the room in drowsy contentment.

The walls were of bare boards, painted dark green; the doors, the window casing, and the latticed grille that formed the upper half of the corridor wall, were painted white. The window and the wide glass doors that opened onto the outer gallery were supplied with linen shades and green shutters, but no curtains. The floor was of hard wood, partially covered by a green Crex rug. The pieces of furniture were good, but of the plainest, and the bed was of shining brass. There was a total absence of ornamentation or frippery of any sort and an ostentatious bareness and cleanliness, an evident striving to create an illusion of coolness, that gave the room something of the sterilized and sanitary look of a hospital chamber.

Richard, however, looked very little like a patient, as he lay, clad in white-silk pajamas and otherwise uncovered, on his bed, for his face was burned and browned by ocean sun and wind, his eyes were bright after his long, refreshing sleep, and his whole aspect was one of physical well-being and mental satisfaction.

He rose at length, very deliberately, meandered over to his telephone, ordered coffee and rolls to be sent up to him, and returned by easy stages to the bed, gathering up cigarettes and matches by the way. Richard never wasted effort or expended an ounce of unnecessary energy, although he could work tremendously when forced to do so either by circumstance or by stress of his immediate desire. In this case, his deliberation was amply justified, for a single hurried movement would have left him drenched with perspiration. As it was, he managed to keep comparatively cool.

When the coffee arrived, he took it

in true hospital fashion, propped up in bed, with the tray across his knees. Then, after allowing time for the full enjoyment of two or three cigarettes, he made a leisurely toilet and descended the stairs.

He had known, before arriving in Panama, that the Tivoli was its only American hotel and that it was owned and operated by the United States government. He now discovered that it was an enormous frame structure, with a long wing extending forward from either end of the main building, so that the central entrance, with its huge, vine-covered porte-cochère, was set at the back of a sort of court.

The open square thus formed was filled with flower beds and inclosed in a hedge of scarlet hibiscus bushes. Broad galleries entirely surrounded the three floors, and all of the rooms were supplied with French doors opening onto these. Luxuriant flowering vines covered much of the lower part of the framework, and the place looked like any one of the many big summer hotels with which Northern seaside resorts abound. Like them, too, the building faced the sea and, although it was some distance from the shore, it stood high on a hill, so that it commanded a splendid view of the bay, while from the rear one could see the old French reservoir with its sentry towers, and beyond that and above it, set high up on the side of Ancon Hill, the stone gateways, the winding walks, and the many buildings that made up Ancon Hospital.

Richard prowled about a little, making himself familiar with the general layout, locating the billiard and smoking rooms, and discovering, to his disgust, that no liquor was sold on the place. There were few people about, for this was not the tourist season, and he quickly exhausted the immediate resources of the hotel. But he had not long to remain unoccupied, for a black

page came to inform him that Barnes, the engineer who had been engaged for the yacht and who had arrived in Panama a few days before, was waiting in the foyer to see him.

Barnes, a tall, lanky, pasty-faced individual, wore a martyred expression as Richard approached him.

"I came this morning, Mr. Mountgomery, but you weren't up, and Mrs. Robinson wouldn't let you be called," were his words of greeting.

"Oh, well, Barnes, you know women," said Richard confidentially, and at the same time marking down a mental score in Alice's favor. "They've no idea of business, and they're always ready to coddle a man when they have a chance, isn't it so?"

Barnes smiled, albeit a little wryly. "Well, I suppose you couldn't help it, but I'm tired already of being at the beck and call of people who don't seem to know their business!"

"Well, you see, Robinson isn't supposed to know much about the boat. You and I are going to look after her."

"Well, it's a good thing you've come, Mr. Mountgomery, for of all the contrary orders——"

"Damned exasperating, isn't it?—when you could just as well have gone ahead and had everything ready, if he'd let you, couldn't you?"

"Certainly. There's not a bit of use in your going over to Balboa till tomorrow if you'll just give me word to go ahead. I've been over to look about, and it can be done like this."

Together, the two men went over all the points that needed consideration before the boat could be launched and, as he had expected would be the case, Richard found that Barnes was quite capable of attending to the details of preparation himself.

"All right, then," he said in conclusion, "I'll leave it to you, and I'll be over the first thing in the morning. I

don't believe in doing a thing myself that I can get an expert to do for me."

"Thank heavens, sir, you have some sense!" was the engineer's gratified reply.

"Thought I'd rather like to have the afternoon to look about," said Richard to himself, with a satisfied grin, when the man had departed.

He determined to drive through the city and was about to call a *coche* for the purpose when he reflected that it might be wise to make some inquiries at the desk concerning the points of interest, for although he had been to Colombia and other parts of South America some years before, he had gone down from San Francisco and, owing to a complication of circumstances, had neither crossed the Isthmus nor spent any time in Panama.

As he hesitated near the door, Alice Robinson came down the stairs. She wore a blue linen morning frock, a small black hat trimmed with a white feather, and long white gloves. A little way off, she looked trim and distinguished, with her pink cheeks and dark eyes framed in soft gray hair; and Richard smiled, as she approached, with the quick pleasure that the sight of an attractive picture always gave him. But as she drew nearer, he saw that her clothing was carelessly pinned together, that her cheeks were smeared with badly blended rouge, and that her lips were an unnatural scarlet. This artificiality, which would have been vastly appreciated by Richard had it been cleverly carried out, looked grotesquely pathetic in the glaring, midday light.

That was the trouble with Alice—she was so pitiful in her efforts to appear young and pleasing that one had not the heart to disillusion her, and yet those very efforts were intensely irritating, and the irritation was constantly augmented by the necessity for concealing it. There are people who have the unhappy faculty of making it impos-

sible for others to do what they know to be right and natural without feeling like brutes, and Alice was such a person.

Now she assumed that Richard would be overwhelmed with delight at her offer to drive with him, and so made it impossible for him to go alone, although he would greatly have preferred to do so. He made the best of the matter, however, and called one of the little high *coches*—or coaches, as the Americans call them—and they set off.

From the Tivoli Road, they turned onto the Avenida Central and there clattered along with a rattling, banging, and lurching which made them fear that the old carriage might be falling to pieces, but which they soon learned was merely one of the peculiar characteristics of Panamaian *coches*, along with the red-faced, quarrelsome *cocheros* and the clanging footbells attached to each vehicle and so continuously used that it sounded as if a multitude of fire chiefs were scurrying through the city, called forth by dire emergency. They were in constant danger of collision, for all of the *cocheros* either drove with the most fiery abandon or else went to sleep and did not drive at all, so that it was often necessary to navigate at breakneck speed around a *coche* that had apparently been deserted in the middle of the street and at the same time to avoid others whose drivers were as reckless as their own.

"Dickie," began Alice, vainly endeavoring to preserve her languid dignity while she bounced up and down on the leather seat, madly clutching its arm with one hand and her hat with the other, "Dickie, I've had such a wonderful idea. I've decided that, instead of waiting here in Panama, I'm going down the coast with you in the boat. Lycurgus doesn't want me to, but I've about made up my mind—and of course you can manage it for me."

Richard was taken so unaware that he gasped and had to gulp and catch his breath before he could say:

"But, Alice, you said all the time that you wanted to stay in Panama. There's a lot to interest you here, a good, comfortable hotel to live in, plenty of people— Why, it's impossible!"

"Why is it impossible?"

"Why—er—it's too dangerous. The boat's not large for the trip—and she's new to us and—you can't tell what may happen. The climate's awful down there. You might get fever or—or the bubonic plague."

"Dickie, you told me yourself that there was no danger, when I didn't want you to go—or Lycurgus. You both told me that it was perfectly safe."

"Well, it is—for us, but—a woman's always different."

"I don't see why. I'm no more apt to sink the boat or attract the fever than you are. Dickie, you just don't want me to go!"

"Alice, how can you say such a thing?"

"It's true, isn't it?"

"Since you insist, Alice, it is," said Richard firmly.

"Why, Dickie?"

"Well, you'd be dreadfully in the way and upset all our arrangements on the boat—and it's a nuisance to have a woman to look after on such an expedition."

"Dickie"—she took out her handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes—"how can you speak so roughly to me, after all I've done for you?"

"Alice," replied the boy, and there was an ugly light in his eyes, while his mouth looked harsh and cruel, "since you drive me to it, I'll tell you why. You've never done anything for me that you weren't anxious to do. Like all the women I've ever known, you flirted and fussed and teased and

wouldn't rest content until you had accomplished your purpose, and now you weep and wail and want to hound me to death because I don't consider myself everlastingly bound and on my knees in gratitude to you for what you've done. I wouldn't take you down the coast with us if the whole proposition went to smash in consequence."

Richard stared sternly straight ahead of him. In his white linen suit of military cut, with his arms folded across the breast, he looked like a young officer who had faithfully discharged a distasteful, but important, duty.

Alice watched him out of the corners of her eyes. She was stifling with rage, but dared not speak again, knowing that she would burst into tears if she did so.

So they drove in silence, and it was not strange that, to both of them, the streets of Panama—lined with dingy old frame or stucco houses whose lower floors were used as shops, while the upper stories, with their overhanging balconies, accommodated swarms of swarthy families—whose pavements were broken and filthy and sprinkled over with sprawling naked babies and mangy yellow dogs, should look exceedingly dreary under skies that grew grayer and grayer as the afternoon wore away.

Just before they reached the hotel, however, Richard turned again to Alice, and this time his eyes were gentle and there was a sort of boyish entreaty in them.

"Alice," he said softly, hesitating a little like a coaxing child, "I hate to be brutal—honestly I do—but what is a chap to do? Don't women ever play—just be natural and happy and themselves—and then forget about it? Why do they think they must always be so serious and everlasting and dramatic about things? Do you feel that you're any the worse for having known me?"

"No, no, Dickie. I'm more glad to

have known you than anybody else. You've done so much for me. It was you who taught me not to wear such funny clothes, and how to treat people so as to get along with them better—and you took me to interesting places and gave me new things to think about. And you would have done as much for Lycurgus, only he wouldn't let you. That's the trouble, Dickie—you'd do it for anybody, and I want——"

"Then, I say, Alice, let's make up and talk about something else," interrupted Richard, while his face beamed like sunshine breaking through rain in his boyish pride at a happy solution. "Look, Alice," he went on with tender anxiety, "you've got some carriage grease on the side of your skirt. I'll get you something to take it out—don't worry. It would be a shame to have that dress spoiled. Blue is your color."

"Oh, Dickie, Dickie," sighed Mrs. Robinson, "were you always like this—with everybody?"

"Of course. How else could I be? Isn't it a nice enough way?" he asked audaciously.

"It's a hateful way!" snapped Alice, as she descended from the carriage and hastened into the hotel.

CHAPTER IV.

Very early on the following morning, Richard started for Balboa on the shuttle train—a queer little train, composed of two or three high yellow coaches and a line of open labor cars, like a yellow dragon with a long red tail. This took him directly to the wharf, where he was met by Barnes, who reported that his instructions had been carried out and that everything was ready for the launching.

The flat cars carrying the yacht had been sidetracked as close to the water as possible, and a runway had been

constructed down which the boat could be skidded into the sea. This was easily accomplished. Her tanks were then filled with gasoline sufficient for a short run, and the two men took her around the peninsula upon which the city of Panama is built into the bay, where she could lie at anchor until the time set for departure. There they immediately began their work of unpacking, adjusting, and setting up the parts that had been detached and stowed away, or lashed to the deck, for shipment.

"Mr. Mountgomery," began Barnes at length.

The two men, stripped to the waist and covered with grease, were perched upon opposite ends of a large tarpaulin-covered bundle on the after-deck, Richard puffing at his inevitable cigarette, while Barnes meditatively filled a stumpy black pipe.

"Well?" queried Richard, pleasantly relaxed after his arduous labors. "What can I do for you?"

"Would you mind—that is—could you get Robinson to advance me a little money? Of course my salary isn't due till the end of the month, but he hasn't paid my expenses the way he said he would—and I came off in a hurry and didn't leave things very well fixed for my wife. She's sick, too—and if I could just get a little to her now! It seemed like such a good thing, I was willing to spend a little to get here, and I supposed it would be all right. But now—begging your pardon, sir—since I've seen a little more of this here Robinson, I'm not so sure it wasn't a mistake. I'm here, though, and I've got to stick and make good. I can't afford not to. And I was thinking that perhaps you——"

Richard, watching with easy kindness the face of the engineer, saw that it looked harassed and tired.

"Poor devil!" he thought. "To be dependent upon some one else—and to

have some one dependent upon you—Lord, what a sensation that must be!” and he shivered at the picture that his quick imagination conjured out of the material presented.

“Come down to the Tivoli to-night, Barnes, and I’ll settle up your account,” he promised carelessly. “I’ll have to straighten Robinson out, once we get started,” he told himself, “but I’d better wait till it’s too late for Alice to butt in and weep and mess things up.”

He tossed away the end of his cigarette and rose, to escape the gratitude of the engineer.

That very afternoon, Richard gave up his room at the hotel and moved onto the boat, where he lived during the rest of his stay in Panama. His days were filled with work and—except for a few calls at the Tivoli, made necessary by Robinson’s refusal to go out to the yacht for conferences—he spent no time ashore, saw very little of the city, and made no fresh acquaintances.

By the end of the week, the boat was ready for the cruise. Her superstructure had been replaced, all of the gasoline tanks filled, the interior thoroughly aired, cleaned, and set in order, the compass adjusted, the engine and electrical installation tried out, and supplies for three months taken on board and properly stowed away.

It was Saturday evening, and they were to sail the next morning. Richard, yielding to Alice’s entreaties that he spend his last evening with her, had himself rowed ashore and driven down to the Tivoli, arriving in time to dine.

The dinner proved a trying one. Robinson was almost sick with dread of the approaching trip, an ordeal that he could not avoid, and the little man’s attempts to conceal his apprehension for the sake of his vanity were both pathetic and ludicrous.

Alice was determined to make her final impression upon Richard a pleas-

ing one, and made a genuine effort to be entertaining, but she was unaccustomed to the exercise of self-control, and the bitterness that had been constantly increasing since Richard’s summary refusal of her request to be taken on the cruise cropped out again and again.

Richard, although inwardly jubilant over the prospective trip, which would bring him one step nearer to the undertaking in which he expected that his fortune was to be made, was at the same time filled with that distaste and uneasiness which an unpleasant scene always awoke in him. That other people should be either disagreeable or uncomfortable in his presence seemed always an imposition to Richard, who loved harmony in his surroundings to the point of caustically insisting upon it, if necessary, harmony meaning to him, as it does to most people, accord with himself.

These three people, prosperously dressed, laughing and talking and sipping their wine, with brilliant prospects before them and with nothing external to trouble them, were so wrought upon by harassing complications of emotions which they had built up within themselves that they presented that most ghastly of all spectacles—that of deliberate gayety, assumed where none actually exists because the occasion requires it.

Richard, while more irritated than the others, suffered less than they, for his was a superficial annoyance, soon to be done away with, and he had an unquenchable spark of joy in his heart, while the others, absorbed in themselves and the fears and cares which the world had cast about them, never had known and never could know joy.

There are people who believe in the decrees of society and who find happiness in conforming to them. There are others who believe that such decrees are just and right, but whose in-

clinations and temptations lead them to break the laws that they uphold. They then spend the rest of their lives in the miserable fear of being found out and in the unsuccessful effort to justify themselves to themselves. The Robinsons belonged to this class. Having been born with, and firmly believing in, the ideals of middle-class respectability, they had, through avariciousness, been seduced into leading the lives of adventurers, and they hated themselves and feared the world accordingly.

And then there are a few pagan spirits, children of nature, who accept her gifts so graciously that more and more are showered upon them; who believe that all of the good things on this earth were put here for use, instead of for discipline; who take their pleasure when and where and how they may and consider their enjoyment to be sufficient gratitude; whose minds are so full of happy dreams that they have no room for contemplation of the principles and policies that hamper other men. These are the descendants of Pan, and in them lives the essence of joy. Richard was one of these. The earth was his playground and people his toys, while his dreams reached up to the sky.

"You've hardly been here at all this week, Dickie, and now you're going—you're both going away, and I shall be terribly lonely," said Alice in her plaintive drawl—a drawl so pronounced that it was almost an impediment.

"But you'll make friends here and go to dances and have splendid times," answered Dickie cheerily.

"Oh, no, I shan't. You know how little I care about making new friends. You'll have so much of men down there, I should think you would have been glad to see a little more of—us while you could."

"You forget the Colombian beauties, with their beads and their smiles," in-

terposed Robinson, with a sly, comprehensive glance from his wife to the boy.

"Dickie is fastidious. I don't think he'll be tempted by Indians and half-breeds," answered the woman sharply. "You've neglected us, Dickie."

"I'm sorry, Alice, but I've had a lot to do. I had to get everything ready, you know," he concluded a little grimly, for in spite of his love for the boat, the thought of Robinson sitting clean and cool on the gallery of the Tivoli had rankled in his mind occasionally while he had been hard at work, hot and tired and covered with grease from the engine.

"One of the advantages of not knowing how to do things," said Robinson, "is that you never have to do 'em. If you didn't know so much, you might have had less to attend to," he went on banteringly.

"There's truth in what you say, but I fancy I'd not care to change places with you," retorted the boy dryly.

"You're not so fond of work yourself, Dickie. You only do it when you're forced to," put in Alice, bristling a little. Although she had no love for her husband and was herself aware of his foibles, it was a matter of pride with her to defend him, as one of her possessions.

"You bet I'm not fond of work," responded Richard. "That's why I do it so well when I have to. I'm so crazy to get back to my natural state of idleness that I do what I must do quickly, so as to have it over with, and well, so that it won't have to be done again. That's why lazy men always make the best workers. No doubt you'll work like a slave if you're ever driven to it, Robinson."

They all laughed at this and rose from the table in a slightly better humor than had been theirs when they had sat down.

They drifted from the dining room into the big open foyer, which they

found well filled with people, for the Tivoli Club was giving a dance that night. The club was an institution of several years' standing. Its object was, primarily, to provide entertainment and to promote social intercourse among the employees of the canal commission. Its membership ran well up into the hundreds, its meetings took the form of semimonthly dances, held at the Tivoli Hotel, and it was probably the most inclusive and democratic club in existence.

Richard and the Robinsons seated themselves on a long wicker bench at one side of the hall and near the doors opening into the ballroom. There they commanded an excellent view of the entire foyer. It was a large room open to the roof, and the upper floors were provided with broad galleries from which one could look down into the hall below. To the left of the Robinsons was the main entrance to the hotel; and directly across from that, two broad staircases, with the width of a corridor between them, led upward and turned, one to the left and the other to the right, onto the galleries.

From their point of vantage, they watched the incoming throng—the Robinsons with furtive delight in being a part of what seemed to them a brilliant assembly, and Richard with interest and amazement, for it was a motley gathering, such as could have been found nowhere else in the world.

The first upon the scene were, of course, the tourists stopping in the house. Of these, some wore faultless evening dress, while others were in traveling costume, and others still had clad themselves in weird combinations which they evidently believed to be the proper thing for tropical dances. Among the latter were a young man in white flannels and a blazer, with a white helmet in his hand, and a girl in white muslin and a garden hat.

The first of the outsiders to arrive

were those residing in Ancón and Panama. Representatives of the various diplomatic and consular corps appeared, correctly dressed, for the most part, although one young English consul stepped down from his room in the hotel wearing a much crumpled linen lounge suit and a pair of knitted bedroom slippers. Now, too, came the doctors from the hospital, clad in white military suits, but easily distinguishable from the officers by their nails, stained black with bichloride of mercury. With them came many of the younger nurses, some of whom were so pretty as to arouse the suspicion that they had come to the Isthmus with matrimonial, rather than benevolent or businesslike, intentions. Also, there arrived a goodly contingent of Panamanians, the men foppishly groomed and Paris-clad, like the pretty black-eyed girls, who were so elaborately gowned, coiffed, enameled, jeweled, and bespangled that they seemed to be dressed for a masquerade.

And now the evening trains had arrived from "down the line," and people came thick and fast—steam-shovelers and mechanics with shining, scrubbed faces, like schoolboys at a party, and with them their fat, red-armed wives, perspiring in silks and satins; young clerks and engineers, with wives or sweethearts, many of whom worked in the telephone exchange, the commissary store, or the schoolroom every day and emerged every evening in gorgeous attire, like butterflies coming out of their cocoons; military men, officers from the Marine Corps or the Tenth Infantry, some of whose women were very smart and bridelike, while others wore costumes that had evidently done duty for many years, but that were punctiliously evening dress for all that. Now, too, came the commission officials and their wives, most of whom arranged themselves in chairs about the ballroom in

imposing array, although a few of them danced occasionally, and one of them ventured to try the tango and was severely frowned upon by the others of her clan. Here came women so above reproach—and generally so ugly—that even the Isthmian scandal clubs could find nothing to say about them; and here were permitted to enter women—and these were usually very pretty ones—whose reputations were so tattered and torn that they would have been outcasts in a less censorious, but more exclusive community.

Over all of these presided a truly charming, gracious hostess, the wife of the manager of the hotel, a woman who spoke evil of no one and to whose never-failing tact and sprightly wit each guest of the hotel was ever ready to pay homage. She it was who came to sit by Alice for a moment, long enough to ask in her pretty, broken English—for she was a Belgian and French was her mother tongue:

"Do you enjoy yourself, Mrs. Robinson? Would you like that I present some people to you, so that you will be less lonely while your husband is away?" Then, turning toward Robinson, she went on, with a birdlike nod of her head and a flash of white teeth, "You leave your wife in my care, eh? I shall take good care of her. I shall present to her many men, so that she may be happy. Will you like that, eh, monsieur?" And she laughed, the gay, infectious laugh of the Continental woman, every inch a lady, but without prudery or self-consciousness.

Richard was quite taken with her, paid her a boyish compliment, and asked her, in French, to dance, to which she responded with a caressing tap of her fan on his arm and the laughing rejoinder, "*Moi, je suis trop vieille pour la danse, mais—*" Then she relapsed into English, seeing that the Robinsons looked puzzled, "But I will find some pretty girls for you."

Richard shook his head.

"I don't like them too young," said he. "And of what use would it be for me to meet pretty girls to-night when I'm leaving in the morning?"

"But you have to-night," laughed Madame Guyon.

Then she rose to pass through the rooms on her little tour of friendly visits.

Richard danced once or twice with Alice, chatted good-naturedly with her husband, greeted with courtesy, but without enthusiasm, one or two chance acquaintances of the Robinsons who were presented to him, and finally escaped to an isolated chair in a corner, where he could be alone for a little while and could smoke, while he watched the crowd that surged into the foyer from the ballroom during the intermission and back again at the first sound of the music, like waves piling up and then receding on a beach.

It was growing late, and people were beginning to look hot and mussed. Fresh gowns had become limp, wisps of hair straggled over necks damp with perspiration and streaked with powder. Men hurried to and from the punch bowl, talking overnoisily, fingering wilted collars and mopping steaming red faces with limp handkerchiefs. It was almost time for supper, and Richard decided that he had had more than enough and that he would leave as soon as the repast was over, since he could scarcely ask Alice to excuse him before.

He leaned his head against the back of his chair, and his eyes traveled upward as high as the first balcony and paused there. A hand hung over the gallery rail—a slender white hand with a large black marquise ring on its forefinger. He looked more closely and saw that a woman, clad in black, was seated in the shadow, half concealed by a pillar at the corner of the gallery. He could not see her face at all—only

the hand, a bit of rounded arm, and a vague black silhouette. He could see, too, that she was accompanied by a man, who leaned toward her, as he spoke, with an air of urgent devotion. Unaccountably the couple interested him. He fell to wondering whether they would come down to supper and hoped that they would.

At this moment, the dining-room doors were thrown open and people began to rush in, pushing, hurrying, and crushing against one another, like a herd of half-famished cattle.

Richard remained seated and kept his eye on the pair that had aroused his curiosity. Presently he saw them rise and move back into the shadow. He turned his eyes, then, to the stairway nearest their corner and waited eagerly. In a moment he was rewarded, for they began to descend, the woman first.

She was of medium height and very slender. Her hair was so black that it looked almost blue and was piled high on her head with obvious coquetry. Her face was creamy white, without a touch of color, and her black eyes looked from under drooping, heavy lids in a disdainful fashion, as if the world had nothing new to offer her. Her lips were rouged in the center, after the manner of French women, so that they looked like a scarlet blossom in a saucer of cream. Her gown of black, clinging crêpe was very long, very low, and perfectly plain, except for the straps of jet and brilliants that held it across her shoulders. She wore no ornaments besides the black ring and a pair of heavy antique earrings, set with diamonds and jet. She might have been any age from twenty to forty, but Richard guessed her to be about halfway between the two.

The man who followed her was a Latin-American, very stout, but straight and well-set-up. His hair was iron-gray and curly, his face ruddy and smoothshaven, his eyes black, his teeth

small, even, and very white. He was immaculately groomed and looked cool and distinguished in comparison with the perspiring dancers. Richard noticed, too, that he kept his attention fixed upon the woman and treated her with the utmost deference.

To Richard, she seemed like a breath from home, so evidently was she a product of that world into which he had been born and from which he had long been an exile. So sophisticated, so artfully simple, so aloof from the rabble was she that his interest was awakened, and these qualities served to exaggerate her beauty in his eyes. He sat staring at her, oblivious of everything else.

She came down slowly, with careless grace, as if she felt herself to be alone in the room, paused a moment on the bottom step, to let the thick of the crowd pass by, and then joined the stragglers and entered the dining room on the arm of her companion.

Richard came to himself with a start, to find Alice and Robinson standing before him.

"We've been looking everywhere for you, Dickie. What's the matter? Did you fall asleep? Look at your coat!"

Richard pulled himself together with an effort and glanced down. The hot ashes had fallen unheeded from his cigarette and had burned a good-sized hole in his white linen mess jacket, which he had worn out of consideration for Robinson, who did not possess evening clothes.

"It's a shame, Dickie," went on Alice. "We hunted everywhere, and now all the tables will be full. Did you fall asleep?"

"Er—well, I fancy I must have. I was in the sun all day. I'm beastly sorry, Alice. But come—there's plenty of room, I'm sure."

While he devoured his supper, without knowing what he ate, and kept up

a running chatter, without knowing what he said, Richard watched the woman in black, who sat at a nearby table. He longed to know who she was, but knew that such a request put to Alice, or to any one else in her presence, would call forth a storm of reproaches before he departed. Madame Guyon seemed to have retired, and he could think of no one else whom he could ask.

He noticed that her escort appeared decidedly prosperous, and reflected that he might be her husband. Certainly she must be a woman of means and position, while he—— If he were only on his way back from Colombia, with his fortune all made, there would be some sense in trying to know her. He could not remember when a woman had

attracted him so much. But why think of her, when he had to leave in the morning and would probably never see her again—and when he had resolved to get away from women, anyway? He decided to put her out of his mind and made a determined effort to concentrate his attention upon the conversation. This proved to be impossible. Intuitively he knew that fate intended to throw the woman in black and himself together. He resented his inability to hasten the event.

Immediately after supper, he made his excuses and returned to the boat, where he saw that everything was ready for the morning's departure and turned in.

Thoughts of an unknown woman followed him into his dreams.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



THERE ARE NO DROWNED MEN IN HER EYES

THERE are no drowned men in her eyes,
 There are no treasures of lost ships.
 There are no bitter memories
 Or dark forgettings in her lips.

There is but springtime in her gaze,
 And dawn on hills. To be with her
 Is walking where the beeches phrase
 Quaint songs, and silver poplars stir.

To-morrow life will come, and then
 She will create, and she will kill.
 Her face will have no spring again,
 Nor any dawns upon a hill.

There will be drowned men in her eyes,
 And treasures out of rotting ships.
 And there will be new memories
 And cruel forgettings in her lips.

MARY CAROLYN DAVIES.



The Light

By Katherine Wilson

IT was in a lull after the first gale of the autumn that Tony, who had been roistering ashore, came back to the Light with the girl, and Lief Thorsen, the keeper, just off his night watch, let them in and heard the story. There had been a dance, a feast, and a dare, and a preacher routed out at midnight to make good the joke. At daybreak they had rowed across to the island, and as they stood before him now—a little sheepish, but with an air of boasting as they told it—Lief listened dubiously. Disgruntled as he was at Tony for having left him alone at such a time, he bethought himself that there might be worse things than having to tend the Island Light alone through a storm. He looked at the girl.

She was a tawny, long-lashed slip of a thing, with a face too old and pallid from the night lights, but with a glint of eye that spoke an uncommon fervor for them; and though by daylight she now hung drooping in her bedraggled finery, there was a flightiness about her— He had seen night-flying moths poised hovering about the Light in a moment before a sudden, frenzied winging. He gave her a slow survey and spoke to Tony.

"A dull place for a woman—this," he said, and did not look at her again.

Tony shrugged.

"Oh, she'll liven it up," he retorted with a laugh.

The girl laughed, too, a little shrilly, and the three went in to breakfast.

She weaved about the house that day, sniffing in and out of dusty corners and about the tower, her laughter flitting back to Tony in pursuit. From his haunt in the watch room, whither

he had taken himself off for some sleep, Lief could hear them pottering about, and he listened moodily. He had no liking for a woman about the place. It had been better before. It had suited him well enough that Tony Trudeau, tilted of hat and swagger of leg, had found more to his taste in the mill town on the mainland than at the Island Light. Scorning the need of such paltry service, Lief had been content to have him go, so much the more did he have the Light to himself.

Now, with the two below— Much good they were, he grumbled. Much he, Lief Thorsen, son of a keeper and himself keeper of a light off Trondhjem as a youth, and now keeper of this one in the Straits of Juan de Fuca—much he needed a noisy rake and a light-minded woman about while he waited for the working of the law! What part had they in it, the two below? What share had they in that which was to come? With a sense of foreboding, he resented them, jealous of his solitude. For it was a solitude that held for Lief Thorsen a promise.

It is not for nothing that the eyes of Norsemen have the close-lidded look of vision. From long sighting across great distances, they have come to see unsuspected things. For now and then there filter down from out the silences of the North strange whisperings, and to have eyes keened to see and ears keyed to listen is a Norseman's gift. The vikings had it when they sailed their *skeids* for the Land of the Midnight Sun; the saga tellers had it when they squatted at the fires of suzerain lords, and told the mysteries of far places they had never seen.

Perhaps it was his heritage from these of a mystic second sight; perhaps it was the fatalism of an adventurous race; perhaps it was only a great hope. But to Lief Thorsen, the boy, in his watchtower at Trondhjem, there had come—not a vision, for visions must have some form and substance; to Lief Thorsen, the man, it persisted still—not in shape and outline, for all realities are but the substance of a dream. But strangely, solemnly, and in answer to a fiercely burning desire within him, there had come—a promise. The meaning was not clear; it is the way of oracles that men must make of them what they will. But the words were plain; out of the sea and his labor, they told him, would come to him his own.

Out of the sea and his labor—his own! The boy, whispering them over and over to himself, had been troubled to know what his own might be; the man, repeating them in the wisdom of the years, had but little clearer notion, though, as boy or man, he had no doubt of their truth. But the boy, marveling, had dreamed of them. In his tower at Trondhjem he had heard them, heard them as strange voices and luring promises. Somewhere out there in the sea, they told him, it waited for him—his own. Somewhere out there. It was but in the nature of things, perhaps, that in the end they had drawn him. Impatient of picket as a wild sea-fowl, he had fled finally from his tower, shipping at the mast for the wide world in quest of his own.

It was but in the nature of things, reflected Lief Thorsen now in his watchtower in the Straits, that, after voyaging to New Zealand, reshipping to Guinea and Borneo, junking through the China Sea to Shanghai, back to Honolulu on a packet, and thence north in a whaler to Bering Sea—he had not found the thing he sought. The sea had laughed at him, strange lands had taunted him, and his seeking had shown

him only the mockery of pursuit, the emptiness of far places. It was but in the nature of things. For the sail does not go to the wind; it takes the wind as it comes. So a man may not find life by seeking it. Here in his tower, with the gulls screaming aloft and the surf mumbling to itself below, all futilely, it was neither luring voices nor promising tongues, he told himself grimly, that ordered safely the course of a man's life, but the sleight of his own hand, steering by his own light.

He had learned his lesson of the world, and well. Men are born to their tasks. It had been but the working of that law, after his ten years' wandering, that had brought him back to the land again and left him, jaded of the wanderlust, keeper of the light in the Straits of Juan de Fuca. The truth of this had come over him as he had pulled out from the mainland the day he had taken possession and for the first time had seen the Light—how it rose stark upon the bluff end of an ochre island in the roadstead, a vast silence about it but for the swishing of the surf at its feet and the scurry of rabbits among its crackling weeds. Grim and alone it stood there in the stream of traffic, and something in its passive courage had shamed him as he had come upon it. So should a man hold fast to his place. Men are born to their tasks, and a man may go far and fare worse, he told himself, than hold to the thing he knows and there bide his time.

Besides—he thought of it now with a gloatingly jealous passion—aloft there in the skull of the tower was a great Eye in a crystal socket, by day close-lidded and slumbering, but by night a keen and tireless Searcher whose beam struck out across the sea and brought within its focus all that came and went there. And that was much to a man in search of his own. It was his light. By the sleight of his hand, he'd

steer by it. His own eyes had gleamed as he had thumped up the tower stairs at sunset that first night to stir the Watcher to its task; and, later, the wicks trimmed and lighted, the winches clanking in the engine room below, and the great Eye flashing in its socket, he had hunched beside it at the gallery rail, his gaze following the arc of its beam as it peered and shifted, blinking, scanning, sweeping the far horizon, and he had been filled with a vast content.

It was his light! With his own hands he tended it. By day he labored at it, trimming the wicks, polishing the lens, shining the brasswork. He had seen pious priests serving at their altars. They could serve with no more fealty than he. By night, the great taper lighted, he hung at the gallery rail, his eyes squinting into space like those of a monk at his meditations, while the smoke from his pipe wreathed up like incense about the dome. There had been something of consecration in it. To hold fast to the thing he knows and there bide his time—it was a pledge he had taken in solitude; in solitude he had thought to live it, while he waited for the working of the law. Now——

He could not sleep. In vain he tried to turn his thoughts from the disturbing presences in the place. At last he rose and went about his chores, but even aloft at his lantern, he found that there was no escaping the two below. For with noisy fooling they were straggling over the island, the day being clear, and the girl, teetering over holes and hummocks, was speeding across the wet sand in screaming chase of rabbits, with Tony shouting at her heels. At his rubbing, Lief eyed them glumly, with growing disfavor—and with a strange instinct of defense. He wanted none of them. He knew the girl and her sort. He would keep to his tower. But once—he had been covertly observ-

ing their antics—the girl espied him there. Immediately she waved him a saucy greeting, and though he pretended not to see, he looked again when he thought she would not be watching—and caught her eyes upon him. He drew back with a scowl and did not show himself again.

The rain and fog closed down once more about them, shutting the three indoors. Lief kept himself to the tower, leaving the others the house and managing to see little of them—only at the shifting of the watch and at meals when, shy to the point of suffering, he reddened at their bold love-making and gulped his food the sooner to escape their dawdling. For almost at once, with impudent glee, they had taken to plaguing him with it. Quick to notice his discomfiture in their presence, they took a waggish revenge in adding to his sufferings. Then, too, something in his hermiting struck them as a great joke, and they were continually twitting him that, unlike other men, he had no taste for company. The girl, especially, with her glinting eyes upon him, taunted him with his aloofness and laughed when he stumbled away to escape her gibes.

Yet—fled to his tower, to his own chagrin, he found his thoughts persistently concerned with his tormentors, caught himself presently straining his ears to listen to the homely sounds of household life below—the clink of dishes, the stirring of fires, mingled voices, and smothered laughter. Shamefacedly he listened, and in time came to nurse a sullen envy. For with the shortening days and lengthening nights and the thinning of the traffic in the Straits, there settled down about the island a thick silence, pierced only now and then by the hoarse snorting of a pilot tug, the muffled croak of a fog-horn, or the melancholy plaint of the bell buoy in the channel; and in his gallery, Lief moped, with a growing sense

of his own exile and a dogged grudge against admitting it. Where once he had been content enough by himself, the presence of the others now filled him with a sense of bitterness, for while a man alone in a place may find even joy in his solitude, one marooned among his own kind has devils in his heart to fight.

He confessed at last to a sickening loneliness—and cursed himself for it. But hungering as he did for the comfort that lies in the warmth of human presences and kinship with his kind, it did not ease his misery, ashamed as he was of it, to argue that a man who finds his place on a lighthouse rock takes desolation for his own.

The rains came on, and in an evil temper November harried the coast with southwest gales. Clumping in and out of the tower and house, Lief now had constantly to encounter the girl and Tony, who, not daring to risk the small boat for a trip to the town, languished on the island, stormbound. Idle, they toasted their boot soles at the pot-bellied stove, and pored over cheap magazines and sporting newspapers, or fingered a grimy pack of cards in fits of pinochle. Sometimes Lief spoke to them; oftener there was no word between them. But when Lief would listen—and, sullen, moody, Lief presently came to listen more and more—Tony talked. He talked and talked, while the girl tittered and wrangled with him over the telling, and all his talking was of doings in the town—the brawls of lumberjacks, of carousing sailors from schooners in the bay, of gaming and dances and girls.

Lief, sucking at his pipe, blinking through his yellow lashes, listened and bethought him of other ports and other dives—the lure of secret lights down murky alleyways; the reek of tar and tidewash, of beer and gin and sweat, of mangoes and musk; shrill female laughter and hoarse cries and dusky,

sloe-eyed bodies slinking through the night. Listened, and smote the table with his fists and lurched away to the Light, there to crouch for hours, lowering into the dark.

So there came nights when the old wanderlust gripped him; when the sea hummed the lure of other places; when, the Light at his back, he leaned out across the gallery with tight-clenched fists shaken furiously at the tempter and, even as he yearned for her with a wanderer's passion, damned her for a lying jade that played with the souls of men.

With the coming of winter, sheets of fog, bellied by the wind, furled themselves about the tower; and now, aloft in their shrouds, Lief brooded, his spirit heavy with unrest. The Eye, no longer able to strike its beam beyond the mists to the open sea, blinked through a film, bleared as with age and blind to what might be abroad. He looked upon its impotence with a dumb dismay. A fancy, nurtured by his solitude, helped him to see in the great Eye's dimming a portentous sign. It was as if he watched his own faith grow dim, the eyes of his own soul failing him, and there began to shape in his heart the fear that breeds despair.

Cut off in a swathe of fog from the world's highways, how could the Light find for him his own? While he held fast to the thing he knew, biding his time, what was passing him out there in the mists? Moody, fearful, he listened to the screaming of the seafowl in the wastes without and thought they mocked him; heard the surf hissing among the rocks below, and grew sullen at its scoffing. Moping, he shut himself closer with his misery then, and scorn came to wrap him in a surly cloak—scorn for the light-o'-loves below, scorn for his own envy of them, scorn for his exile. In the end, a dark and sodden thing took shape in his heart like a

lurking devilfish, and out of it despair ran black within him.

"Out of the sea and his labor!" He spat out the words one day, for they were bitter in his mouth. A man might tend his light till the Day of Judgment, he scoffed, to no end but the winging of bats and night moths.

And it was just then that the girl appeared.

She came weaving up hand over hand on the ladder and, laughing, stepped up beside him where he was rubbing sullenly at his brasswork. Tony, irking at the dullness, had dared the storm for the town. For company, the girl had sought out Lief in his tower—she said. Glum and lowering, Lief went on with his rubbing. But the girl, sniffing about and ignoring his silence, plied him with whimsy questions, now and then whisking him with her laughter, sweeping him with her tawny lashes; and there was something more of friendliness in her manner than she had ever shown before.

Under the blond fringe of his lids, Lief accorded her now and then a slow, appraising glance, and continued at his work. Yet it is only a wooden man who cannot, and therefore does not, soften under a woman's wiles, and though he may be but the victim of her jests, it is a truth of the vanity of any man that he would rather be made a fool of than ignored, and it had been long since a woman had given Lief Thorsen the flutter of her smile. In the end, he crumpled his sandy thatch with clumsy fingers and mumbled some grudging answer to her banter—a small concession, but enough for the girl, with her glint of eye upon him.

After that, each day she scaled the ladder to the Light—for Tony continued to find surcease in the town—and, flitting about the tower, she trailed Lief at his tasks. When he wiped the misty prisms, she perched herself upon the railing and chattered to him. When

he worked at the gearing or the wicks, she hovered near, handing him his tools or dabbing with her fingers at the oiling, and it was at such times that he noticed that her hands were small and fluttering, and that the lightness of their touch was like her laughter.

One day, at the flash of a thought, she shuffled him out of the watch room and herself took possession; and when she let him in again, it was to show him a woman's handiwork. For she had fitted him out from the house below with a cushion for his chair and a shade for his lamp, while the once dusty floor was clean, the windows clear. Something in the deed smote Lief where he suffered most. He fled to the gallery and left her gaping after him, while for hours he stared out miserably at the sea.

Then there came the Great Gale, as it was known for months along the coast, and for six days Lief ate and slept and watched in his tower alone, Tony being marooned ashore. The girl brought his breakfast to him when he came off the watch at sunrise, and when he had eaten, he stumbled away to bed and to sleep. Before sunset he was up again, trimming his wicks, oiling his gears; then, his supper disposed of, he was off once more to the tower. What the girl did with herself in the meantime he did not know. She had food and fuel, and for the rest there was only herself to amuse. As for him, he had enough to do to tend the Light.

There had been no storm like it in years. Alone in his tower, which he had left dark that he might the better peer out into the storm, Lief kept his watch uneasily. He had been too long a farer on the high seas not to know that gale which is a mere battle clash of the elements—in which a man may find some zest as in a fair and gamey fight—and that other which is a brazen tumult at the hands of fiends to muffle the footfalls of a sinister Thing

that stalks the dark. And in this one was that which warned of a Shape abroad that is no fair foe for any man. He was filled with vague forebodings.

At midnight of the sixth day, he was bending over one of the winches that governed the flash, tinkering at the gearing. Something was out of order there, and, muttering uneasily to himself, he was searching for the cause. A night like this and things going wrong with the Light— No time for the winch to stall! Devil must be in the thing.

He had stooped to screw fast a bolt, squatting in the shadow cast by his lantern, when the door of the room swept open, and, as he sprang up in alarm, the girl came veering in. A draft swept with her, whipping about her the folds of a shawl that trailed from her shoulders, and as she stood in the doorway, fluttering, with the light of his lantern turned full upon her, she was like some driven winged thing that had beaten in from the night.

"The storm!" she almost screamed, as she saw him. "I'm afraid down there in the house—alone!" Her voice was shrill and wailing. It was like an echo of the wind outside.

"Safe enough in the house," Lief rebuked her gruffly. He stood fumbling with the tool in his hand, casting about in his mind for words to make her go away. No place for a woman—the tower! No place on a night like this! Besides, a man had enough to do—

"Six days," she screamed at him, "six days I've been alone in that hell down there! My God, it's driving me wild!"

Lief looked at her again, and believed it. Her eyes, with the old glint in them, were darting crazily about the room, and her hands clutched frantically at her shawl. Perturbed, Lief turned and drew up a chair—it was the one she had cushioned for him—and motioned her to it. Her breath coming short, she

sank down upon the cushion, folding her shawl about her, while Lief struck a match to light the lamp above her head. That done, he turned and went over to his window.

Reflected in the glass, he could see her figure behind him, cowering in the pool of light, huddled in her wings as if they were her only safety. Weak and wild she was—this girl—and desperate, a light thing given to gay moods and festive pleasures, no woman to be alone with her fears! Tony? Damn Tony! Why didn't he look after his woman? No business to bring her, anyway, to the Light; no business to leave her alone! A wave of pity swept him—and a hot resentment. It was not his job, he stormed to himself. He, Lief Thorsen, he was not her man. It was enough for him that he tended the Light while her man gallivanted in the town. Yet here was the girl, glint-eyed with fear, and there was Tony roistering ashore, and here was he—

He clenched his fists, cursing under his breath that life should play such a trick, giving one man a task he was unfit for and denying another his own. A grisly trick! He cupped his glowering face with his great hands to peer out into the storm, though his eyes saw nothing. They were big hands, strong hands, hands fit to work for two, himself and his woman. Yet he had no woman, and here was this girl—she had no man! He scowled into the darkness, all his old bitternesses thick upon him. "Out of the sea and his labor!" The words came to him mockingly. Devil take the sea and his labor! A man was a fool—"Hold fast to the thing he knows and bide his time!"

He laughed aloud—and was struck dumb by a thought. "The thing he knows"—this woman? He shot a look at her in the glass and found her eyes fastened upon him with a wild, appealing gaze that filled him with shame for his harshness. "Out of the sea and his

labor!" How if, maybe, this girl who was here— How if it was for him—not what he wanted; it was no weak and cowering woman that he wanted!—but to give—

There came a blinding flash out of the night and close upon it a crash of thunder that broke directly overhead. It sounded as if the tower were being shattered into a thousand pieces. In the chair there was a swift, unfolding movement, and, the swathe of her shawl winging out from her shoulders as she came, the girl darted toward him. He saw her coming—saw her with a strange, half-furious, half-exultant fear and that old instinct of defense. The next moment she had thrown herself upon him. Her hands were beating madly at his breast.

The wind set up a fierce, wild hammering with its fists, the blows shaking the tower from base to peak, and, like the tower, Lief trembled. The island rock itself seemed shaking on its base, and there was nothing to which a man could hold. It was a hellish place, the rock! It was no place for any human, woman or man. To-morrow, when the storm cleared, he would leave it—with this woman. Yes, by God, he would go! Together, to-morrow, he and she— Now he could not think. Something was pounding at him, beating at his skull like the storm at the tower; he was slipping, slipping, and there was a flare about his eyes like the flash of the Light.

The Light! The words recalled him sharply, and by instinct his eyes turned to the window. The Light? Where was the Light? All was black outside with a terrible blackness. His gaze clung wildly to the square of the window as he waited with clutching breath for the sweep of the arc across that area of the night. He waited—*too long for the timing of the flash*. Of that he was aware. The Light—it was not there! It had not passed— He did

not know how long since it had passed; he had not been watching. That thought struck him like a blow. He had not been watching! Since the girl had come in, he had not watched. As if in the darkness his own soul had gone out with it, leaving him in a black abyss, he tried to cry out. He could make no sound. He could not move. Something was holding him in a vise, something soft and clinging that was dragging him down, down from the place he knew—

Suddenly, out of the night, there rang a strange, wild note of alarm. Hearing nothing with his ears, seeing nothing with his eyes, nevertheless from somewhere out of the storm Lief heard—a summons. Like a cry that has no voice, like a vision that has no shape, like a call from the silences of the North, it came; and, his ears keyed to listen, Lief Thorsen heard—and answered.

With an oath he tore loose the clutching hands at his breast, sickening in revulsion at the thing that would have wrested him from his place. For this he had failed of his watch! For this had the Light failed him! By such weakness men lost their strength of soul! Rage shook him. He tore himself from the grasp of the girl, and she fell away—but only for an instant. Whirling, her black eyes glittering, she darted for him again, as a moth beats herself against a light. In a fury he flung her down, and this time she crumpled at his feet, again like a moth, a moth that is spent and shriveled from veering too near the flame.

He gave her as little heed. Though terrified, she was safe, and there were sterner things for him to do. With a sense of disaster strong upon him, he sprang for the ladder. Another moment and he had made the gallery rail, his glance darting from side to side in frantic search for the shaft of the Light. Suddenly he found it, and the finding brought a smothered oath to his lips.

Striking straight across the night, the great Eye was staring in a fixed and stolid gaze, as if the Searcher, seeking, had been abruptly halted by an object in its path. Lief's glance swept swiftly along the beam to the spot where it broke into a pool of light, and there, full in the flood of its revealing rays, listed to her deck rail and pounding in the trough of the sea, was a sinking ship.

He stood gaping at the sight. Shaken by the night's fears and its mysteries, he gazed out upon the object with eyes filmed to a vision of uncanny things. Once, in Benares, he had seen a wonder worker produce a beautiful woman from a bamboo rod. It was some unearthly power. Some such thing he was beholding now; some such magic had given this substance to that wild, strange note of alarm. The Eye, its steady focus bent upon this stranger in the night—how had it held there but by the stay of some mighty Hand? His own went up, trembling, to wipe the sweat from his dripping face. A Hand—reaching into the tower—stopping the winch—

The winch! The word brought back his scattered senses. The gearing had gone wrong. And this—this was a wreck! It took no second sight to see as much. Himself again, instinct for duty uppermost, he turned to dart below. But even as he did so, he shot another look at the Light, pointed straight as the eye of Fate upon the stricken vessel, and his breath came short.

Down the ladder he swung—almost trampling, at the foot, the figure huddled there—seized a rocket from the stores, and flung down the tower stairs. In the lee of the building, he fumbled for a moment before the flare of his signal could rend the black sheet of the sky; then he made for the boat.

Beached in a cove on the lee side of the island, the dory was swinging

at her moorings. It was but a moment's task to leap aboard and cut the painter; it was a sterner one to beat out of the shelter of the cove into open water, but once on the swell and headed well out to clear the surf, he threw the weight of his body to the oars and, against the lash of wind and rain, bore around the point toward the laboring vessel.

In the full play of the Light now, he made her out. She looked like a brigantine of foreign build, listed by a shifted cargo or a leak that bunged her lower side, for, by the sag of her, she was half full of water. Stricken at sea, she had doubtless put in for safety—only a desperate skipper would have dared the Straits without a pilot on such a night!—and she was beating for the island, plainly at her end, for in the sleeted rigging clung the figures of her crew.

Lief thought they must see him by now, as he swept his boat into the play of the Light, for he himself was sufficiently near to make out a movement on her decks and for his hail to carry to her.

"Ship ahoy! Ahoy!"

Borne to him faintly on the wind came an answer and, close upon his second cry, a sharp command. Riding on the crest of a rising wave, his boat was swept up and on and down, until, with a swift onrush and a swing of the oars, he was borne close to the lurching vessel. Reversing his stroke, he fended himself from her sides, noting as he did so a huddled group at her deck rail. They were working clumsily at something—bodies stiff with cold are not deft at the ropes—but in a moment they had it loosed and thrown it overboard—a rope ladder that dangled wildly in the gale.

Quickly Lief swept his dory alongside, his own peril heightened by his swift answer to that mute appeal. As the boat rose again on a comber, he

dropped his oars and caught the swinging rope that fell twisting to his hand; then, steadying the boat with his body as he clung, he shouted his success and straightway felt a tug on the ladder. Beneath him the dory lurched and lunged on the churning waves, but he gripped a thwart with his knees and held fast. The ladder swayed and sheered with the plunging and the weight of what he knew to be a descending figure, and still Lief held on. To have loosed his hold would have been to let the ladder fall back against the vessel's hull, perhaps dashing out the life of the body clinging there. Forth and back and up and down they swung, until his torn hands, gripping the rung, felt the touch of a lowered foot. Then, with a shout, he gave the word for the drop, at the same time sweeping the dory inward with a mighty shove; and as he held fast, he felt beside him the lurch of a dropping body. The boat shuddered, tossed and swept out by the force of the fall. Lief seized the oars to right her, and as he did so he found his fingers entangled in the streaming hair of a woman.

Sheered out, the boat rose high on a mounting wave, bearing clear of the staggering hull, and, carried by the next, was borne off to some distance. With the dinghy swirling and pounding in the trough, Lief bent to his oars to wear around for another rescue. But before he could turn, there rang out a fearful cry. A great sea reared itself above the stricken ship. Suddenly, she took it. There was a crash of timbers, a mighty roar—and the wave was coming on for the dory!

With a lunge, Lief bent to swing the boat head on, and to do so dropped one oar for the strength of his two hands on the other. The free one, clattering in its lock, dipped to a wave that bore it back against the pull of his own, and the strip of timber in his hand bent like a reed. The great wave came on.

But in that moment there was a stir from the figure lying huddled in the prow. Dragging itself to a thwart, it groped toward the oarlock, seized the dangling oar, and lifted it clear. The counter-pull on his own released, Lief bore back with all his might. The figure at the other, having now drawn up on the thwart, dipped her blade and bent also to the stroke, and together, in that perilous moment, Lief and the woman strained at the oars—strained till joints cracked in arms and shoulders. Obediently the boat came around. Swept high on the towering wave, it sheered down again into the trough, the swell passed under, and they rose safely on the next. Then, cresting this, the two with one accord turned their faces toward the spot where the ship had been, and the woman uttered a low, despairing cry. On the lashing waters was a swirling mass of wreckage.

"The poor men!" she moaned. "The poor, poor men!"

It was not the voice—though in a moment's lull in the storm the sound of it was like the murmur of wind in a sail—it was not only the voice that caused Lief Thorsen to throw up his head, his nostrils quivering, like a lookout scenting land on the breeze; it was the words. The woman spoke the Norwegian tongue!

At the magic sound, something in Lief sprang into life and stood transfixed with wonder. Here, across the world from Trondhjem, the language of the Northern silences, the voice and tongue of the luring promises! He was almost afraid. Across the reaches of the world— It was like a mighty Hand at work steering a long-shaped course. A Hand—the same, maybe, that had stayed the Light!

He shot a look upward at the great, calm Eye, clear and steady in its crystal socket, its beam fixed fast upon these two in the sea's vast darkness, and a sob broke in his throat. The working

of the law! "To hold to the thing he knows and there bide his time!" The words burst from his lips in a shout of triumph. With a new grip on the oars, he cried out something above the storm. He never knew what he said. He knew only that the woman's head was lifted, her face turned toward him in the glow from the Light, and that a vast new strength was in his arms.

With a word, he indicated to the woman that they must make for safety. Wreckage was all about them. Battered by wind and waves, the boat was threatened every moment with destruction. Shouts brought no answering cries from the water. There were no more lives to be saved. Dumbly she acquiesced. Together, at his signal, they steadied the boat; together, in turning, they swung her broadside to the storm and held her firm while she settled to the swell. Then, with a sweep of the oars, they bent her prow toward the land. And not once, as they labored there for safety, did Lief Thorsten remember, in his brusque commands, that this was a woman, spent and therefore doubly to be spared. In the bitter cold, it was well that there was work for her numbed body to perform—that he knew. But in the poise and power of the figure, swinging freely and with practiced hand at her oar, was that which spoke strength and wisdom and the courage for both. There was no need to spare her. No woman was this to cling and whimper her fearfulness in the dark! Ready was this one to meet with equal fortitude the rigors of life or death—a man's woman, a woman of his kind—and in their common need, he took her as he found her, with a mighty joy in the taking.

They turned about and scudded before the wind, the bluff end of the island uprearing in the dark before them as they came. Steered for a sandy piece of shore line, the boat rose high on a comber and poised an instant; then a

long, racing sweep, a swift and perilous tossing, and it dropped safely on the shore.

Staggering out of the shaken craft, the two dragged it well up on the beach. Then Lief made a gesture toward the house above, and in silence they bore up the path, he in long, hasty strides, the woman pacing evenly at his side—a stranger, Lief bethought him, yet one he seemed to have known a long, long time. A brave, rare woman—this, he marveled, as they went, a brave and sturdy woman, pitiful, patient, and strong to endure.

With his fist he struck open the door of the house and led her in. Half blinded by the sudden lamplight, at first she did not see the wide-eyed figure lurking in the shadows as they passed, but Lief threw a look at the girl as he strode to the smoldering fire to stir it alive. Safe enough she was, for all her fears!

"Get dry clothes!" he ordered gruffly.

And then he turned to look for the first time at the woman. Erect, full-bodied, head coroneted in braids of brown, she stood facing him, still, in her somber eyes, the haunt of recent horror, but in them also that lofty faith and stoutness of heart which, having once looked bravely upon death, has nothing to fear of life. Something in him leaped up at the sight of her as it had leaped at the sound of her voice in the storm. It may have shown in his face, for at that moment there came a cackle of derisive laughter, and the girl, who, instead of obeying him, had teetered out into the lamplight, now stood stinging him with her glinting eyes in which there was the malice of the woman scorned.

Lief's face went black.

"Get dry clothes!" he thundered, and this time, cowering, she scurried away.

She of the storm looked up.

"You are hard with your woman," she rebuked him.

"She is no woman of mine," Lief answered hotly. "Her man, my helper, is carousing ashore when he should be here. To-morrow, with the clearing of the storm, she shall go to him, and there will be no coming back for either."

The woman took up the words.

"To-morrow?" she echoed. "Then I can go, also. My sister is in a town on the mainland. I was coming to her in my uncle's ship from Norway. She is all I have left in the world."

For a moment, Lief did not answer. His eyes were traveling slowly about the room, seeing for the first time its utter barrenness. Then, "I will take you to her," he said. Something in his look and voice may have moved her compassion.

"It is a grim place to be in alone," she remarked.

Lief nodded. "All at once he threw up his head and faced her.

"I'll be no more alone," he declared, with a ring of triumph in his voice, "for you'll come back to me. You'll come. It is the promise!"

The woman, looking up quickly, met his eyes—met them with that proud aloofness, that fearless measuring which comes of a clear and simple knowledge of primal truths and the courage to face them. Their eyes held. They looked at each other. They looked long and steadily, while time gave way before eternity. For in that moment there was more than the bond of race, more than the fellowship of perils shared, more than the cleavage of man and woman, that sprang into lock between them. There was the bolt that is shot by destiny when two souls stand face to face and each knows its own.

Slowly, with outstretched hand, Lief Thorsen took a step toward her.

"Out of the sea and my labor," he said softly, with a great and pleading tenderness. "It was said by the words of the promise. Out of the sea and my labor?"

And because there was in her, too, the fatalism of an adventurous race, even while she marveled, as his own she answered him.



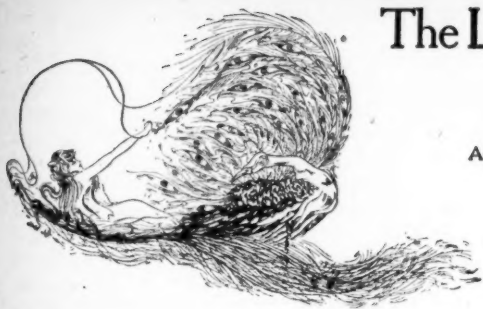
LOW TIDE

THESE wet rocks where the tide has been,
Barnacled white and weeded brown
And slimed beneath to a beautiful green,
These wet rocks where the tide went down

Will show again when the tide is high
Faint and perilous, far from shore,
No place to dream, but a place to die,
The bottom of the sea once more.

*There was a child that wandered through
A giant's empty house all day—
House full of wonderful things and new,
But no fit place for a child to play!*

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY.



The Little Chasm Rose

By Horace Fish

Author of "The Trickstress,"
"Apasionada," etc.



SHE was exquisite.

Pink and white, and humming, and making fine white lace, she was seated in a stiff little green cork tree directly opposite the white house of Padre Pedro, whose big, black, pensive figure, as he sat, chin in hand, on his doorstep, seemed entirely, in its silence, concentrated upon her.

"Yes," murmured the padre, "she is completely exquisite!"

So the whole town said, and the town of Terassa usually was right when it came to youthful beauty—or, as in this case, when youthful beauty came to it, which Rosita had done a year and a half ago, with two of the dirtiest, least pleasant people God had ever shoved into the village.

Her name was Angelica. But the people had almost instantly pet-named her Rosita, the little Rose.

She had been fifteen, then, a child, against the ugly background of her parents. But the tender popularity of her beauty was not a matter brought about by contrast. With whatever setting—dark or light, suave or rude—she was like a little trinket of fragile filigree, handmade of sensitive silver, so delicate that it would bend from its shape at a touch, yet retain all the fine loveliness of its design.

As she sat in the cleft of the little cork tree, a rod across from the padre, working as earnestly as he was gazing,

he wondered if anything in his town, Terassa, or in his history, life, had been more catching to the heart. For she was just now a problem, and a hard one, to the padre, as innocence so often is for good people.

Most of Terassa is at a peak of a drooping green hill, for towns are likely to be sociable, and though a few houses straggle in proud fashion down the highway, the bulk of architecture and society clusters around the pretty village square at the pinnacle. Back of this, straight down and wandering irregularly off into the distant mountains, lies the chasm, a rough, beautiful, deep, mysterious place.

In the early part of it, like modest satellites of the glittering village, several neat little houses cling to the gray chasm sides, quite removed from town, although so very near; Tula's, for one, and diagonally opposite Benito's, for another. And it was in this thin neighborhood that Rosita's rude parents had chosen their abode—the farthest house, a gay-tinted little dwelling of two rooms, in the very gloom and grandeur of the actual chasm.

The padre had not desired them as citizens, for they had looked like folk who never went to church, and such had proved to be their case. Yet he could not with justice send them away, for they had proffered rent for the house in advance, and though they had

told nothing of their affairs or history, neither had they poked into other people's. Besides, to have allowed so lovely a creature as Rosita to vanish in the keeping of such guttersnipes would have been asking too much of human nature; priest and people had been at one in this. So they had stayed, quite as if they had been regular Terasans, consistently minding their own business, which was that of wine and warfare, drinking one night and weeping the next and wrangling whenever Rosita went to church, which she did constantly—they detested by the town and she adored, a trying situation.

And then a delightful thing had happened.

Within a year, the twain had scratched and bit and yelled each other to death. They had not murdered each other; they had both died of heart failure, as if theirs had been a great love, the second half of which had fled, in desperation, swiftly after the first.

The whole town was happy, the padre much happier than his conscience approved. And as a compromise, he had hastened his thoughts from the part of the business that should have been sad to rejoice legitimately in plans for Rosita's future. In search of a likely home for her, he had sent the finger of his mind down a list of townsfolk. Old Rosa, his favorite townswoman, would not do; she would not tolerate any one in her house, or if she suddenly should, to spite his judgment of her, there was her disposition—too suggestive, externally, of what Rosita was unhappily used to. *Simpatica* would be perfect, but her house was small. At last he had decided to have Rosita choose between several families, noticeable for healthy good humor, who lived by the village green and near to him.

But what had taken place instead was very different. When the priest had asked Rosita just where, and with what description of folk, she would

prefer to live, Rosita had seemed surprised, and had said that she was going to continue in the little house where she had lived with her parents, whom she loved, for she would be less lonely there, of course, than somewhere else.

The startled padre had started to explain, but as he had gazed into the two deep wells of glorious purity that were her crystal-colored eyes, he had found himself unable. She was old enough to know something of life, but she was so like her christened name, an angel, that a lump had risen in his throat and made him unwilling for the moment to find out of what she was, or even of what she was not, aware.

Her solitary residence in the chasm might mean positive danger. Not only were there many gypsies in the mountains, but there were several wicked people in the world. But this was hard to explain, with eyes like his, to eyes like hers. Nor could he skip the question by means of authority, for the house itself was hers. Her parents had not realized that their mutual regard would carry them to heaven quite so soon, and had paid the rent for nearly a year ahead.

Though it was the very farthest into the chasm, the two houses neighboring it were quite close—Tula's, indirectly across, perched on the opposite chasm wall, and Benito's, on Rosita's own side of the chasm and reasonably near her.

Tula was a grave, mature young woman, a lacemaker, capable and strong in work and in character. Benito was a religious fanatic, so fervent that he had once defied the padre himself on a point of behavior.

All these thoughts had risen swiftly in the padre's mind, like the lump in his throat, as he had gazed into the light-colored eyes so fresh from the funeral. He had procrastinated. He would explain to-morrow.

But he had gone to Tula and Benito and cautioned them. They were not to

sleep that night until Rosita's light was out, which would mean that her door was locked and she safe in bed.

Their replies had been instant, and bespoke their characters.

"God and I will care for her!" Benito had cried tensely.

"I will watch," Tula had said quietly.

It was a lot of trouble for them, as the padre had self-reproachfully realized. But it was a trouble that they had lovingly taken, not only that night, but every night since, for the padre, whenever he tried to grasp the nettle, would fall silent; and in the meanwhile, Rosita made history in the town with the two beauties of piety and lacemaking.

Though she had gone to church and was so much and so instinctively loved, the first time the town or even the priest had seen the full texture of her soul was one day at sunset, on the village green, when Faraquita, a lady five years old, had caused a sensation at the village inn.

Faraquita had hurled down her five dolls in the vestibule, here, and there, and there, and there, and there. And although God had given almost no one else five dolls, and although she had always been a good woman before, she had refused, and had kept on refusing—in a temper as feminine as it was Spanish—to pick them up, in spite of the uproar all about, and of the fact that her decent parents stood by so mortified and pitiful and blushing. She even seemed proud of her deportment, and sang a little tune.

It was just then that Rosita had come up, on her way home to the chasm, and, having learned the cause of the sorrow all around, had said, very gravely and quietly:

"Faraquita, you have heard about heaven, have you not?"

"Yes, too much," said Faraquita, who at her worst was truthful.

"But," said Rosita, again very quietly

and very gravely, "did you ever hear that heaven had a rule?"

Faraquita stared for a moment, and then, with her mouth open, said:

"N—no!"

"Come onto my lap and I will tell you about it," said Rosita.

She sat down on the vestibule steps, and Faraquita climbed onto her lap, and Rosita took one of her diminutive hands in her own delicate clasp and held it up with its fingers stretched out like a little pink fan in the sunlight.

"Heaven has a rule," she said. "And it is a very easy rule for little children to learn, because it has five words, and you can remember it by the five fingers on your hand. We will take it thus—the thumb first, because the thumb is the most important finger on the hand and the first word is the most important of the rule. With her other hand, Rosita touched each one of the golden-pink little fingers: "Order—is—heaven's—first—law."

And Faraquita, her gaze very large, had got up, picked up her five dolls, and, wide-eyed as they, walked home with her parents.

And as great a sensation as Rosita had thus produced had been caused by her lacemaking. Tula herself had no more skill. Intricately threaded as any from the maturest hands in town, the lovely patterns had forever in them little pictures of piety. Though a whole border appeared of lilies, fruits, and roses, this would be at first sight only, for a passion-flower would be hiding among them somewhere.

Tula, the quiet, sedate, efficient, undertook to sell Rosita's product with her own, on her periodic trips to Barcelona. And she returned with far greater prices from Rosita's work than from her own, as delighted as if the moneys and the triumphs had been reversed. It was thus, somehow, that Rosita was loved.

As she worked so silently, so indefat-

igably, in the little cork tree to-day, Padre Pedro sat brooding upon her fragile loveliness and his shirked problem regarding her.

"Rosita," he called suddenly, "what design is that you are making now?"

Her reply was to hold the frail wreath of thread up to his gaze, and at the rich beauty of it, a little gasp broke from him. Delicately marked as spider skeins on the yellow sunshine, the design was an interwoven multitude of crowns of thorns.

When she had lowered it to her lap again, a haze seemed to have hovered out of it and to stay lingering in the air between them. Perhaps the appearance was from a mist in his eyes.

"Angelica——" he began.

She looked up at him, blushed, and went on with her work. His grave naming her Angelica had startled her. But there seemed to have been something else, too, underlying so delicate a swiftness as that of Rosita's childish blush.

"Angelica, why is it that you, almost a child in years, make always such designs, and with such constant labor? You do not need half the money that you make, nor are you likely to have need of much laid by—though that, I hope, is still a far-off subject. Is your unceasing industry simply because you love it, or have you some unspoken purpose in it?"

Her look met his for a fluttering, hesitant instant. Then, with a little catch in her voice, she said:

"Padre, I—I have had a vision."

Despite all his knowledge of her imaginative nature, the priest was startled.

"A vision, Rosita? Come, tell me of it, dear!"

Again Rosita blushed, but the busy movements of her fingers ceased, and she met his eyes steadily.

"I have several times seen a—a face, when I have been hunting lace flowers

in the chasm. They are my favorite flower, and—this is my favorite face. I have seen it there among the trees, and it is like an angel's face, only—sad, oh, so sad, like Christ's, though without a beard, and young, too young to hold such sorrow, and gazing at me so hungrily—as if begging me to save it! Oh, padre, it is as the face of a lost soul! And"—the delicate color suffused her cheeks once more—"it came to me that if by my labor I could make a large enough votive offering to the Blessed Virgin, she would rescue that poor, tortured soul and give it peace."

"But——" began the wondering padre.

"Oh," cried Rosita, trembling in her eagerness, "you will let me make the offering, will you not? I have never before told you, fearing you would think that I was foolish! I was afraid you would laugh at my idea! But I assure you that I saw this vision! I have prayed and prayed to the Virgin to tell me when the offering was enough, and she has lately answered me the amount, straight in my heart. And when I have it, you will let me do this, padre? You will? You will take the money for your church?"

And all he could find voice to answer, as he strove to smile at her, was, "Yes."

II.

Rosita had told the truth to Padre Pedro, but not all of it. Some strange instinct, hidden away in an unexplored recess of her soul, had forbidden it. The face that she had seen, with its hungry beauty of a damned angel's face, had come to her as a vision would have come, was vision enough to satisfy her word, but it was flesh and blood. The lost soul the Virgin was to save, for her rapturous labor's sake, was wandering on earth in an earthly body.

As she climbed the bit of highway leading from the Chasm Road and made

her way, with the sundown, into the village square, its green was as gay with townfolk as with sun colors, from the simple fact that to-night was Tuesday night.

Two weeks ago, on Monday, old Rosa had proposed a succession of Tuesdays, as if the calendar had not been capable of it. And when it was discovered that her plan was for all the women to sew for a general fund, and for every one, except herself, to talk—upon religion—the idea had been eagerly adopted. Her voluntary silence, a mystery to every one but herself, insured it. No scheme in the village history had met with more widespread popularity. Any number of men were left alone who had not been left alone for years, and some who had not been allowed to talk chose now, on Tuesday nights, not to be alone. In total, the appeal of the extraordinary institution swept in a vast number of ladies, some husbands, and a few bachelors.

Even Tula, who read books at home and rarely sought the town, was drawn thereto, while Benito came to bathe luxuriously in wordish images, soaping himself with adjectives.

The padre stayed away. Though the topic was a dangerous one, he did not interfere; their sewing did the town a lot of good, and their conversation the Trinity no harm.

And like the padre's, another pious heart was, for to-night at least, inclined away. Rosita knew that she was expected there. But though she did not know of Padre Pedro's instructions, for her sake, to Tula and Benito, she had been feeling the touch of prison shadow from their loving sentryship; and as she walked through the gathering crowd in the square, her thoughts were fondly of her small house far below in the heart of the chasm, and of full freedom of soul in the early moonlit hours for the enjoyment of a sacredly personal matter—the counting, after

trembling abstinence for weeks, of her money. Her heart sang to her that, with Tula's return from the city yesterday, the full sum had been earned and was waiting to be told.

For to-night's holy liberty, she had let it wait last night.

Glancing at the crowds for glimpses of Tula and Benito, she ran down the narrow, steep path into the last shreds of the sunset and the first shreds of the rising chasm mist—fine as her own laces—and into her house, and hastily prepared her supper.

The moonlight was streaming in when, the supper put away, she stood for a moment in prayer before fetching out the money.

She started to sing as she lifted the money bag and its cotton-clothed weight onto the table, but for very joy her voice gradually grew low and died away, as the money grew real before her eyes and under her pink fingers.

Against the rude interior of the little room glinted silver and actual gold, while great dull coppers, with thumbled monarchs on them, seemed to melt into the brown of the walls.

There was more than enough, but she decided that, in case of a mistake about any one of the silver coins—for Spain will make mistakes here!—she would give all the overplus to the church, in order to feel safe. And, happy and satisfied, she looked up to thank the Virgin for having accepted her prayer—so completely contented that she almost expected to see the Blessed Lady's face.

But the eyes that met hers were not those of the Virgin. They were looking silently in out of the black night at her—and at the money. He was standing framed squarely in the doorway, and the beautiful face was more full of wickedness than she had ever noticed before. The clothes on his slim, starved-looking body were ragged and of two materials—yellowish corduroy

and some nameless, dirty thing, probably cotton, a faint blue in color, that clung with a semblance of neatness across his chest, as if both it and he had been washed in a brook. He had on also a pair of cheap boots out of a city shop, torn away to the absurd appearance of sandals.

His hands, nervous and long and with big wrist bones, were clenched tight at his sides. He had light blond hair, especially yellow against the brown skin of his neck, and seeming to cast shadows into the two deep hollows of the cheeks. Brown eyes flared out between these dark cheeks and the light hair.

"You need not count your pretty money any longer," he said, "because it is not yours now, but mine."

Rosita rose shivering from her chair, her small white teeth chattering, her hands, like small pink birds, fluttering uncertainly between her money and the rosary on her bosom.

"Oh," she said, "I dare not say so, for I am praying for those about to commit sin, but are you a thief?"

"No," he said, and his young laugh fled into the lonely chasm like the ghost of a soul already damned. "But I am going to be one now!"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Rosita. "You do not know what you are doing! This money belongs to the Virgin! You might be horrible enough to steal it from me, but would you steal it from her? You do not know what she wants it for!"

His hands had nearly touched the stacked coins, but now he drew back in surprise.

"What does she want it for?"

"To save your soul!" gasped Rosita.

Again he laughed, but he drew toward the doorway, and the echo of the laugh stopped short in the chasm.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Oh," said Rosita, tears suddenly running down her quivering cheeks, "because I pitied you so when I saw you

wandering all alone through the tree shadows! I thought you were an angel that had sinned against God and so sent himself to hell! But I felt sure that you had not meant to sin, and that if I prayed enough, and worked to get enough money for the Church—you might be an angel again!"

She was sobbing, but she held herself upright, bravely meeting his staring, bewildered brown eyes with her grief-stricken, disillusioned green ones.

"It is my first crime," he said roughly. "So get out of the way and watch me commit it!" And with a short, rough laugh he stepped again toward the table.

"Oh!" said Rosita. It was a last faint little sob as she stepped between him and her treasure. "After what I have told you, can you touch it? Do you know nothing of God's love?"

"There is no such thing as love in the world," he said contemptuously. "I have always thought that. But," and a new excitement crept into his sharp laugh as for the first time his eyes drank in the full measure of her dainty loveliness, "you make me think there could be! There are kisses, anyhow! Yes, I have changed my mind about your money. I will take kisses instead!" And as, wide-eyed and with a long shivering breath indrawn between her chattering teeth, she shrank away from him across the room, his thin hands reached for her.

"Wait!" said Rosita.

All the grief and pleading, all the tears, had gone from her silver voice, and the one word was a shout that reverberated through the room and echoed and reechoed out in the darkness more terribly than had his laughter.

As she had shrunk shuddering back from him, her whole body and soul cringing in the white, merciless flare of the new horror, God had worked in her the miracle that is worked in

a fruit-tree blossom as its bud bursts into sudden glory under the magic touch of a heavy drop of rain. In that little more than lightning flash of time, everything that the padre had wanted, and failed, to make her understand, she suddenly understood, reading it, hideous and unmistakable, in this man's burning eyes. The little chasm rose of cool gray shadow had opened not to the sun, but to the flare of an ugly furnace. With her agonized, pleading hands hovering over the coins, she had been a child; with her updrawn and seemingly magnified figure standing like a statue of rage before her cupboard, she was a woman. The rough alteration of her voice, her gesture of terrifying command, the fierce glory of her beauty as she met his dark eyes with her light gray-green ones turned to emerald in their hardness and their hate—it all had the marvel of transfiguration. With her devastating knowledge had come a devastating power.

After a moment's pause upon her shouted word, her voice rang on at him, appalling in its music:

"Touch me by so much as one of your horrible fingers on my dress, and with the strength of God rising up in me I will blast you so that you will know the full heat of hell before He sends you there! Do you think me powerless before your strength? You will think twice, for I am not alone! God is in this room, right here between you and me, and though you cannot see Him, can you not feel Him?"

So awful in their sense of literal reality were her words that the trembling man instinctively looked about, with a pitiful narrowing of his shoulders as if under a lash. Then, forcing himself to laugh, he met her eyes again.

"I—I meant it when I said I would not take your money," he gasped. "But your kisses I want, and though you boast of a power that you have not got I am going to have them!"

"You beast," said Rosita, "I have boasted no power that I have not got! I have started the fear of God in you, and you will be in the full clutch of it presently! I told you I had thought of you as a poor, lost soul, doomed for some crime for which you must long to repent, and I have tried—worked—to save your soul! But what you are is only a plain, loathly thing—like a spider. You are not even a snake, with the one-time virtue of the devil!"

"Stop calling me words like that!" he said, a flush of anger turning his cheeks a deep, sullen red. "It sounds like things that were said to me in jail! I will not kiss you, I will *kill* you, if you do not stop!"

"Jail!" flashed Rosita. "You told me you had never yet committed a crime!"

"You fool!" he said. "Neither has many a man who has rotted to death in a cell! And, after all, I will not commit one now, though I am going to kiss you. Call that what you like, it is not a crime! Why, it would be a crime not to! Listen, now! You have said something about love that has made me want to kiss you. And I will not hurt you. I would be afraid of your damned town afterward! But kiss you I will. Let me kiss you all I like, and I will not only leave your money, but leave you. Will you? Come, be sensible, for I am going to anyway!" And again he stepped toward her.

"Stop!" said Rosita, and again her one word was a shout that boomed into the chasm and shot echoing away through it. "*I would go, like Joan of Arc, to the stake, first!* And if I should go to hell, for the sin of hate that I feel for you now in my heart, even in hell you would never kiss me, for I tell you there would be chains there binding you down that would be heavier than any put on me, and I could crawl the necessary inch to keep some flame between me and your utmost reaching finger! Those chains are on you *now*!"

They are binding you there where you stand! Did I not tell you God was in this room? Yes, you are looking about for Him again! You do not see Him, but you feel the chains! You are looking for their shadows on the floor! The fear of God has entered into your soul! You do not move because you do not dare!"

He was shaking, his brown eyes darting distractedly about, but at her triumphant challenge he threw up his head, his eyes steadied themselves upon hers, and his voice, though it shook, rang defiantly out at her.

"I *will* dare! I care nothing about your money now, and if you are right about damnation—which is nonsense—it is worth it to kiss you!"

"Blasphemous soul!" cried Rosita.

One hand, reaching back of her to the cupboard, seized up a great white china pitcher and struck it against the wall so that it shattered about her feet, leaving only the thick, curved handle, with rough fragments at the ends, clutched in her fingers. She stepped toward him with it shaking in her little fist.

"I have told you God is here with us in this room, watching us both! Every word that I have said to you He has told me to say, and now that the moment has come, He has told me what to do! I do not think that He put me in the world with murder in my soul, or that He intends that I should be murderous now, but you shall from this moment obey me, or, while I will try not to murder you with this, I will gouge your face to ribbons with it! Do you hear me? Do you see it?"

"Yes," he gasped, "and as you stand there with it, you little cat, I am helpless. I cannot back out into the chasm and grab something to disarm you, for you could barricade your door, or follow me and maim me; and I cannot throw myself forward and fell you, for you are just six inches too far off!

But it is not because God told you what to do to the fraction of an inch, but because you are a clever harpy! And I tell you, the only reason that I do not kiss you now, instead of waiting till I get my chance, is because of your cleverness and that thing in your hand. It is not because I have any fear of your God, or of any of the rude, awful things you have said about hell!"

Greater, lovelier than in its first regal flare at him, Rosita's beauty seemed to burn into a pure silver fire as she drew upward, and her voice, as if each word had been an arrow, seemed to cleave the air in the contemptuous passion of her utterance.

"Dare you again defy the power of God? I do not need this to maim you with, but to teach you!"

And she hurled the china-dagger to the floor beside his feet.

"Now, if you are not afraid of God, pick it up and carve me with it for my loathing of you! I would rather you slashed me with that than with the contamination of your hand! Pick it up, or step beyond it, if you dare!"

"Oh!" he gasped, his thin hands shaking pitifully toward her. "Oh! I would never hit you with that, or with anything! I am not as bad as that! I do not want to hurt you at all! I want only to kiss you! I do not know whether I am afraid of you or afraid of God— Yes, it is you I am afraid of! I do not believe I have chains on me! I do not believe He can stop me! I am not afraid of Him! Yes, I am going to kiss you!" And he took a desperate, terrified step forward.

"*Kneel down!*" shouted Rosita.

And as if her voice had struck him with a stone, he sank to his knees, his wondering, staring face lifted to hers.

"Do you fear God?" she cried.

"Y-yes," he shivered.

"You know what I earned that money for," said Rosita. "Do you want me still to save your soul?"

"I—I want you to love me!" he whispered.

"Fool!" cried Rosita, her voice bitter with scornfulness, though a swift pain caught her heart at the misery that the word shot into his face. "Only God's love can save you from the hell you are shuddering there in fear of! My money cannot save you now, for your wickedness has defiled it, and I will never offer it to the Virgin! But you shall obey me—you shall save *yourself*! Will you obey?"

"Yes," he gasped.

"Get up!" said Rosita, and he rose and stood trembling before her. "Here is my money bag," and she tossed it to the table. "Take the money and put it in!"

"Oh, no, no!" he gasped. "Put it back yourself! I am afraid to touch your money now! It would burn me! You would make it burn me!"

"If it burns you," said Rosita, "it will have been your doing, and not mine! You meant to steal it! Pick it up!"

Shivering as if it were the touch of ice or fire, fearfully, he did so, keeping his eyes away from it, striving to keep them away from hers. One piece fell to the floor. Unyieldingly, her gaze drove him after it, and a little sound wrenched from his throat as his groping fingers struck the china dagger.

"Now," said Rosita, "obey me still or you are lost! Take that, and run straight from this door to Padre Pedro! Tell him you came to steal the money from me and stayed to fetch it to him as my messenger! It is his now, to do with as he likes!"

"Oh, no, no, no!" he was pleading.

"Then, on lowered knees, confess to him how you tried to rob me of my soul, and why I have sent you to him for absolution!"

"Oh, no, no, no!" he was still begging, moaning, but she pointed, with the last effort of her weakening voice.

"Townsfolk may enter the chasm at any moment. Go!"

And after one last pitiable look at her, enthralled, cowed, he obeyed; and, striding to the doorway after him, she stood in it, inexorably pointing, watching his fleeing figure.

She was still thus standing, swaying, staring, when a running figure pounded up to her through the mists and shadows. It was Benito.

"Rosita!" he gasped. "Rosita! All saints forgive me and Tula! We did not know you were not at the meeting! Rosita, something fled by me in the dark! What was it? Had it been here?"

"It—it was only a lost soul," said Rosita, "seeking salvation."

"Rosita," cried Benito passionately, "it was a *man*, and I can see from your poor little face that he has been here! What was he here for? I demand that you tell me!"

"He tried first to steal my money—and then my soul," whispered Rosita, "but it is all right, Benito. My soul is saved, and so will his be soon. He has gone to Padre Pedro."

Benito was inarticulately gasping out his rage and horror.

"Say nothing, Benito," whispered Rosita. "It is best so. Tell no one! It is in the padre's hands."

But Benito, choking with fury, suddenly broke from her and dashed across the chasm, and as Rosita sank with a little wailing moan of grief and dismay to the floor, his voice sped between the chasm walls like a lit fuse to the rage of the town.

"Tula! Tula! Tula!"

III.

Padre Pedro sat in his big chair, a portrait of fatherhood against the dark, candlelit wall of his little study, not, in truth, merely thinking, almost brooding.

His thoughts were quiet, restfully weary. They were of heaven, of course, and of its suburb Terassa, and, as much without favoritism as possible, of his chiefly dear ones in it. Rosa was one, necessarily. And Rosita was one, two, three—twenty— It was impossible to say how many times precious to him was the heavenly perfume of that single little chasm rose.

Single—what a word! Single—unprotected— *Unprotected!* Then that was the word that had subtly drawn his mind from pensiveness to brooding! That was the word that had been picking like an anxious finger at the back of his brain ever since his last floating look of her as she had gone from him up the Chasm Road! He should have known that there was some unspoken purpose in her when she had left him as if to join that foolish meeting on the green! The childishness of it would be as outlandish to the pure child nature of Rosita as it was to the definite make-up of his own mature brain.

Benito would certainly be at this exciting idiocy, and Tula, with her love of studying everything, would doubtless be there, too.

Yes, Rosita, for some purpose of her own, had deliberately intended not to go! And the padre sprang up with raised arms, with articulate speech that, part prayer, part assertion, reverberated through the room:

"My Father, forgive me for my self-indulgent, my sentimental inaction! I will, with Thy grace, go this instant to the chasm! This very night she shall sleep with Tula, and thenceforward in the town, with whom it is best! O my Father, grant me enough promptitude to reach her, enough sternness upon my arrival!"

He reached for his hat and was starting toward the door when it swept madly open, and a pale, unholy-looking creature fled in with the rushing moonlight and after one desperate, longing,

upward look at him, fell to its knees before him, swaying, strangling.

"Rosita!" it choked. "Rosita!"

"*Mi Dios!*" cried the padre, his great frame shaking. "Be silent for one moment, and then speak! Come, get up!" And seizing the shoulders of the miserable being, he fetched him to a standing posture and gazed straight and deep into the wretched eyes. "Now! What of her? Tell me instantly—is she alive?"

"Here is her money!" cried the shivering man, and he dropped the heavy packet that his two hands had been clutching. "She said—I think it is what she said—that you must give it to the Church!"

"O-oh!" gasped the padre, thinking his question answered and dropping the man as the man had dropped the money. "I am too late! God has punished me! How did she die? What devil killed her?"

"She is not dead!"

Instantly the light of joyous relief leaped into the old man's eyes, and his arms swept forth again toward the youth. But with the words the cringing creature had drawn himself upward and now stood straight and tall as a candle before the priest.

"But it is kind of me to tell you so," he cried passionately, his words darting like a gust-blown candle flame, "when you have thrown the word 'devil' at me! I tell you I am tired of words like that, from jailers, and from Rosita, and now from you! And it was unjust, for I swear to you I never even meant to kill her!"

"You never meant to kill her?" cried the padre. "*You?* It was *you* assailed her? Ah," and he stepped backward, his big voice shaking like his big hands in his bewildered horror, and seized hold of his chair, not as if for support, but as if to chain himself back from seizing the man, "it is fortunate, for both you and me, that I am a priest, or

murder might indeed be done to-night! God pity all inhuman human beings!"

"Stop it!" cried the shuddering boy. "I am not inhuman! If I was before, I am not now. I have told you I can stand no more abuse! Rosita is untouched and safe, and I am here not because I had to come, but because she told me to, and I obeyed her! I have come to confess, to have absolution, and to be saved! I went there to steal her money—that was all—and I had cause to! I meant her no harm, except to hurt her feelings about her money, and that was only for her parents' sake!"

"For—her parents' sake?" stammered the padre.

"Yes!" laughed the boy wildly. "Do you know how they got the money that paid for them here and that pays now for her house? They were mountebanks for whom I climbed a rope, with which they also beat me every night because I would not steal. I was with them only for a month, because I was fifteen years old and a fool and thought I would starve unless I took their offer. And I thought, too, that because I could read and write—for I had decent parents till they died—I would have some kind of advantage over the pair, but, instead, let me tell you, the good was all to them, getting them favors with the authorities and getting beatings for me because it made them hate me so much more.

"When I first came into their filthy tent, I began to set it right. Remembering *madre mia* and her words and ways, 'Order is heaven's first law,' I said, and that brought me beating one—with that same rope I had to learn to climb. There were nice knots in it, tied for the climbing, but good for the beatings, too. 'One of the Apes from the Top of Gibraltar' was their advertisement of me, and they jeered at me after every climb that they had a beautiful daughter, whose monster I should be when she grew up.

"I never believed the draggletails had a daughter, or that, if they did have, she could be beautiful, for I was certain they would have used her, too. They kept her dark, I can tell you—and kept themselves and their business dark from her. And now that I know they did have such a girl, I can see that they were saving her beauty for the market.

"*Dios! Dios!*" gasped the padre, with a shudder.

"Steal!" they would say, and 'Steal!' with the rope. 'We will yet make you steal!' And when their dirty selves were caught, they put the blame on me, and I have lain awake for years in jail, called all the names that I have been called to-night by you and her, and planning how I could pay them when my term was out! And while I studied how I could have revenge, they died, damn them, and she was all that I could wreak it on! So blame yourself, not me and every one else—the way they did—if through your negligence I have frightened her!"

With both hands clutched now for support upon the chair, the great priest was swaying in his grief like a wind-tossed tower.

"God answers me! You are abhorrent to me, but I deserve your lash, and in this moment I must pity you, not her! My—my—son—are you repentant? Convince me. What made you so? You ask for absolution. Are you a Catholic?"

"I do not know!" cried the boy, and he fell like a snapped flower at the old man's feet. "I am sure I was baptized once, but all I think about it now is that I have found out about love to-night, and what Rosita says about my soul—is good enough for me. Though my term was done six months ago, I have felt out of jail for the first time to-night when I came running to you!"

"Poor child—dear child!" choked the padre, bending down to him. "It is well

that God watched over you on the way, for had the town seen you and suspected your story, you might never have got here! You are not alone in loving her. My whole people love her, and should she have told— Oh, I am glad you are in sanctuary! They are in a mass together on the green. Can you hear their voices? They have not been so loud before to-night! Ah—*mi Dios!*—*why are they so near?*”

“Because they are coming for me,” shivered the boy. “I do not mind the voices. It is the coming feet. I feel it as I felt the civil guard long ago. I can always feel it!”

The padre strode to the window.

“You are right!” he cried. “They are almost here!”

“Do not stop to feel sorry for me,” cried the boy, “but do what she wanted. Will you absolve me?”

“I absolve you, and I protect you!” cried Padre Pedro, and with one swift finger touch of the uplifted brow, he sprang to the door and flung his big body before the loud throng that seethed almost against the house, almost against him, its clamorous voice breaking into separate shouting voices:

“We know he is here!” “We must have him!” “He is not for you to punish! We must punish him ourselves!”

“Be still!” thundered the padre. “Is this Terassa? Are you my people? Though you were not, I am still your priest, and I command you. Be still!”

But the voices, again like one voice, clamored on:

“We are your people! But we know more about religion than we used to! We love you, but we have found out that you are too kind to people! Give him to us!”

The priest’s answer was to fling his arms across the door frame so fiercely that the little house seemed to shudder.

“Terassa, this is the most awful moment of my life! Are you Christians?

Your cry is that of the Jews to Pontius Pilate!”

It silenced them for one instant, but their ringleader sprang forward from them—Benito, white-faced and terrible in the moonlight.

“He is a thief,” he cried, “and more and worse! Christ did not deserve to be crucified, but he does! Give him to us!”

And the shout was repeated and repeated by women and by men.

“Over my body!” cried the priest, but past it, ducking under one of the great arms, darted the man they sought.

“Let them have me! I deserve it for what I had in my thoughts against her!”

The crowd surged at him. But the big arms were swift, and over the swarm, as if walking on their heads in her fury and her strength, came an old woman’s figure and, plunging between the two figures and the crowd, slapped back Benito. It was Rosa.

“You apes!” she screamed. “I know now why God inspired me to hold my tongue at your idiotic meetings! It was that I might have the more voice now! And I see, too, why the padre has always blamed everything that went wrong in town on me, for this is all my fault! I should never have pushed open your imbecility for my amusement, and the padre never should have allowed me to! I went beyond myself, in fact, I got stuffed up with you and went home, and that is why I am late, but I will go further still to down you now, if it means to my last breath! You fools and rogues, would you disgrace yourselves, your priest, and Spain?”

“But we do not want to kill him!” chattered Benito. “We never meant to, for we are Christians! We only want to beat him with a rope and to put him in jail!”

And the crowd resurged hysterically

forward, and its accumulated voice cried out again:

"You are too good! We must have him! And if not, we must have a reason!"

"Terassans, my people," cried the distracted padre, "the word 'God' is too often on our Spanish lips! But let me ask you, have you ever heard the word 'love'?"

And as it swayed them momentarily back, a voice—again a woman's—rose from the wild rear rank of them.

"They will see it, if they do not hear it, now!" And Tula, her arms strong with all the strength of her frantic, yet solemn cry, lifted the little chasm rose up above the heads of the mob and held her before their sight.

And her voice, metallic and sharp as silver also, cut through the sudden hush of them.

"It is my cause that you fight!" she cried in glittering syllables. "Do I look like a banner—like Joan of Arc's, perhaps? Well, a flag can lash! And as my right, you have got to give me, and not any woman or man else, the first lash at him! Make way for me!"

And as if her fierce command had veritably lashed them instead, a gasping path was made for her of massed human walls between the spot where Tula stood and that where the boy shivered and the padre moaned, for a helpless moan tore from him at the pity of it—of her wondrous, furious beauty and the wondrous symbol so queerly crowning her golden hair.

She was like a pale, vivid little flag in the moonlight. She was beautiful, with all the exquisite fragility they had known and familiarly worshiped, but her beauty was now informed with a tense splendor of hot emotion that none of them would have supposed so delicate a vessel could generate or hold, and its energizing fire seemed to stream

alike from her eyes, her parted lips, her uplifted hands. Like a white flame, too, moved by the night breeze and the swirl with which Tula had swept her from the ground, there floated from her head, where it was wound like a coil, the ravishing lace, all built of crowns of thorns, that had brought a mist into the padre's sunlight that afternoon, and that now shone lovely as silver spiderwebs under the moon.

Tula's strong arms set her down at her end of the human lane as the padre, striving vainly in his horror for some word for her, simply moaned again at his, and she rushed through it like a charging battle banner and fell upon the boy and, with her fierce little hands clutching him, turned upon the crowd.

"Now beat him if you can, and if you wish to, without beating me! Do you still ask a reason?"

"Yes!" wept somebody. "It has been all for your sake, you know, Rosita! Even you must give a reason!"

"Then," cried Rosita. "I will give you one! It is because, though you think me a *religiosa*, I do not want to be a nun, but a mother, as my own dear mother was, and if he goes to death or goes to jail, I must be a nun! If you crown him with thorns by thonging him, so will I crown myself! Do you see this lace that I have made?" And one of her frantic little hands left its hold of the boy to lift the beautiful gossamer forth in the moonshine. "Do you see the pattern I made in it? If you take him from me, it shall be my veil! Do you need clearer reason? It is because I love him—because, ever since I first saw his poor face in the chasm shadows, I have always loved him!"

And with a little sob that was lost in the big choking one of the padre, she hid her face in the boyish arms that—wondering, almost not daring—her "vision" had closed about her.



More Super-Women

By Anice Terhune

Louise of Stolberg:

"The Wild-rose Child"

SHE was called "the Wild-rose Child"—at first. Later, other epithets, less poetic, hovered about her pretty ears. Whether or not she merited them you shall see presently.

She was not exactly German, or Spanish, or Italian, French or Scotch. But the blood of all these nationalities flowed in her veins. Hence, she was weighed down with the name of Louise Marie Maximilienne Caroline.

Her father was Prince Gustavus Adolphus, of Stolberg-Gedern. A Hohenzollern! You will recognize some of the familiar family traits as the story goes on. Luckily, her mother's remarkable mixture of blood—she was a Scottish Bruce, a French Montmorency, a Spanish Medina, and an Italian Colonna—helped to dilute the German strain. It cropped out only semi-occasionally.

Gustavus Adolphus—like his Swedish namesake—was killed in battle—not a Hohenzollern habit. He left his family miserably poor, and they became pensioners on the bounty of kind-hearted Maria Theresa of Austria.

As a child, little Louise spent much of the time in a convent. In her early teens, she was made canoness of Sainte Wandru, at Mons, where so much terrible fighting has gone on. Probably German shells have since de-

stroyed the very window from which the Wild-rose Child looked wistfully out upon the world.

Wistful she was, lonely, and very romantic. She loved stories of adventure—especially stories of "Bonny Prince Charlie," Scotland's exiled idol. These thrilled Louise more than any other tales. Her heart fluttered delightfully at the pictures of the prince she conjured up. During the long, silent hours, when she should have been at her devotions, she dreamed daydreams about this hero of hers, and sighed to herself, wondering whether it could ever be her happy lot to see him, just once, in the flesh.

One day she was hastily summoned to the convent's reception room. Her mother had arrived on a surprise visit. The youthful canoness ran to her mother with all speed and not a little curiosity.

"You must pack and come with me at once, Louise," were the excited words that greeted her. "You are to be married to Prince Charles Edward Stuart. It is all arranged!"

Louise grew ghastly white and grabbed dizzily at a chair.

"Marry—Prince Charlie?" she stammered. "Does—he—want to marry me?"

"He doesn't care whom he marries," went on the match-making mother, with

brutal frankness. "He wants an heir to the English throne—when he gets the throne. You will do as well as——"

But the little canoness had fainted. Her daydreams were more than come true! For she had never in her wildest moments imagined herself as Bonny Prince Charlie's wife!

In a whirl of excitement, the bride-to-be was whisked off from the convent and plunged into a sea of wedding preparations. For fear of displeasing Maria Theresa, the affair was kept secret.

The marriage was set for Good Friday—1772—and the ceremony took place at a little town near Ancona, in Italy. The seventeen-year-old bride, exquisitely beautiful by nature, was lovelier than ever before. Her dark hazel eyes were crowned by a halo of golden hair. Her dainty wild-rose complexion—which had given her her nickname—was more ethereally delicate than usual. Her finely chiseled, tip-tilted nose lent a spice of piquancy to her otherwise almost too angelic face.

All this the bridegroom saw—and mightily approved.

As for the bride, her look of mystic, dreamy happiness changed to an expression of helpless horror at her first glimpse of her future husband. Surely there *must* be some mistake, she thought! Here was no "bonny" Prince Charlie—no "bonny" *anything*! Instead, there grinned at her a gaunt, elderly man—he was then fifty-two—with a red, bloated, pimply face, made redder by contrast with a white wig and by the reflection from a crimson silk suit crossed with the ribbon of the Garter.

Instead of her bonny prince's tender smile, she found herself confronted with dull, thick, silent-looking lips, purplish rather than red. Her frightened eyes shrank from the greedy gaze of this monster, whose vague, leaden, wa-

tery-gray orbs, streaked with angry red, leered at her with proprietary appraisal. His whole face was inexpressibly gloomy and debased.

It was too late now for Louise to draw back. Sick with disillusionment, she went through the ceremony bravely.

"It is only what one might expect of a marriage solemnized on the saddest day in all Christendom," she said when it was all over.

Charles took his youthful wife to Rome, where, for two years, they dwelt in the old Stuart palace.

Louise seems to have tried very hard, at first, to live up to her nuptial vows.

"Even at the opening of her married life," writes her friend, the Marchesa Vitellschi, "the word 'happiness' could not be mentioned in connection with her wedding of Charles Edward. But for a certain time the novelty of the situation had a beneficial effect on him, and distracted him from thoughts of the past. She, on her side, was pleased at his attentions, and liked her position as wife of a sovereign, even though unrecognized as such. He tried, at first, to keep fairly sober, but with his return to drink, he exposed his wife to the most shameful humiliations."

Will you let me take a line or two of your time—before we go on with the story—to tell you a few blunt truths about this same Bonny Prince Charlie?

He was a romance hero, the idol of Scotland, the subject of a thousand adoring songs which ranged from "Charlie is My Darling," to "The Lad Who's Born to be King"—and he was one of the most consummate blackguards and wastrels in the history of scoundrelism.

The English people, very wisely, had kicked his grandfather, James II, off the throne and into the discard. About sixty years later, when England was ruled by a pig-headed German king—George I, who could not speak a word

of English—the grandson of James II took advantage of George's unpopularity to snatch for the British crown. This grandson—Bonny Prince Charlie—was a true Stuart. All the Stuarts were worthless, as the English found to their own cost. Yet there was a magnetism and a charm about them that stuck crosswise in the popular fancy and that would continue to stick there until dislodged by a painful operation.

It took Waterloo and Sedan to cure the "Napoleon legend." It took Belgium's martyrdom and the World War to cure the Hohenzollern legend. And it took Bonny Prince Charlie to cure the British people of the Stuart legend.

In Scotland, especially, the Stuart name shone bright. And in Scotland, the gloriously handsome and magnetic Charles Edward raised the standard of revolt against England in 1745.

The bonny prince was still in the early twenties. Scotland went mad over him. Right graciously he accepted the loyalty of the clan chiefs. With equal graciousness, he pocketed their money gifts and seduced their carefully guarded daughters. In the same bright spirit, he fled back to the safety of France when his rebellion failed—and left his loyal followers to be butchered or imprisoned by the thousand.

For the rest of his life, he lived chiefly on money sent him from Scotland, assumed royal airs, and talked vaguely about heading a new rebellion. While waiting for such a rebellion, he wallowed happily in every form of vice, liquor predominating.

Louise found herself tied to a vacant-headed sot, who was happy only when dead drunk. Charles was so jealous that, if he left the palace without his wife, he invariably locked her up in her room for safe-keeping. Then, too, her position in society was trying. Royalty refused to acknowledge the Pretender's claims. The Grand Duke

of Tuscany offered to receive him as "Count of Albany," but Charles curtly declined this honor.

"The King of England receives, but will not be received," was his haughty reply.

"They were king and queen," says a chronicler, "but had no kingdom. They had a court, but no courtiers; jewels, but no crown; etiquette, but no power."

Louise, possessed of radiant youth and a healthy mind, soon resolved not to let her life be smothered in the nauseous wreck that had tumbled about her. As a relief from the vile beast to whom she had tied herself, she feverishly turned to books. She studied diligently and methodically, devouring knowledge in a way that very nearly made her into a pedant.

Her intellect expanded astonishingly. Yet, in spite of all her efforts, time hung heavily on her hands.

Then came her trial flight as superwoman. At the house of a friend, she met Karl Victor Bonstetten, a young German who had come to Rome with introductions from the German court. Surrounded by soft Italian voices, they chattered together in guttural German. Karl was homesick. His harsh mother tongue sounded sweet on Louise's pretty lips. Before he knew it, he was hopelessly in love with the little queenlet. He lost no time in pressing his suit. In spite of Charles' jealous watchfulness, Louise managed to have a duplicate key made for her apartments.

Charles, having carefully locked her in, generally repaired to his own rooms and gave himself up to his beloved bottle. Louise, biding her time, would wait until she heard his drunken snores through the keyhole; then, with true German craftiness, she would tiptoe out to her waiting lover.

Bonstetten was to her only a charming episode. But the man loved her

madly, all his days. Forty-four years later, at the age of seventy, having long since passed entirely out of her life, he wrote to her:

"You are and will remain the only woman I ever loved. I never pass through the Apostles' Square without looking at that balcony—where we were so happy!"

About this time, Roman society began to wake to Louise's super-woman charm. Her wit, beauty, and intelligence fascinated every one who came near her. She was lovable to a degree. Dozens of adoring suppliants for favor knelt at her pretty feet. She gained the nickname of "the Queen of Hearts." Mengs, the Bohemian painter, and Ippolito Pindemonte were among her victims. But in the midst of all the cardiac chaos she caused, her own heart remained quite undamaged.

Then came the great, all-absorbing passion of her life—her love for the Italian poet Alfieri.

She met him at the time of all others when most she needed distraction and sympathy. During her five years of married life, Charles had rapidly slid downhill. He had forgotten all the promises of good behavior made to his brother, Henry of York—by far the best of the Stuarts, and always a true friend to Louise—at the time of the wedding. He had a way of forgetting his promises. He insisted on going to the theater each night, no matter how drunk he was, and Louise was compelled to go with him. She had to assist at the humiliating spectacle of getting her royal husband out of his carriage, and to stand by while the servants laid the drunken figure on a sofa in the stage box, where he slept and snored through most of the performance—only waking to help himself to more wine from the bottle that he always ordered placed by his side.

He also had frequent epileptic fits, which added to the general joy.

"He is drunk half the time, and insane the other half," wrote the British ambassador at Rome. "At the masked balls, nothing would prevent him from mixing with the crowd and dancing with any girl who happened to take his fancy. He was so drunk on one occasion that Count Spadi, of his suite, had to stand close to him all the time he was dancing, to prevent him from falling."

Small wonder that Louise, now in the full maturity of her beauty and intellect, grew weary of acting as drudge and sick nurse to a man who responded to her care only by insults, hideous oaths, and often by blows.

Into the midst of all this came Vittorio Alfieri, young, tall, pale, and handsome, with masses of gorgeous red hair. He had a reputation for gallantry; he was an officer in the army and a fine horseman; he was possessed of brilliant satirical wit, a sardonic tongue, and marvelous self-control. Always unhappy, always craving excitement, at heart a poet above all things, he found in Louise his ideal.

"In her," he said, "I have found at last the woman for whom I have been searching, who, instead of being—like all the others I have known—an obstacle to literary fame and a detriment to all elevated thought, is an incentive, a noble example, to every great work. Recognizing and appreciating such a treasure, I give myself up to her."

In Alfieri, the super-woman found her happiness. He was full of tact and sympathy, and their intellectual qualities alone would have drawn them together, aside from all question of their love.

The rôle of *cavaliere servante* was a recognized position in Italy at that day. It implied the constant attendance of a man on a married woman, and his carrying out of all her wishes. Sometimes such an arrangement was platonic. In this case, it was not.

For some reason, Prince Charles took a lenient view of the affair—at least when he was drunk, which was almost always. He gave Alfieri the run of the house, and would curl up in a more or less comatose state by the fireplace while the poet, seated at a writing table at the further end of the room, worked with absorbed interest, inspired by the presence of his "Muse Louise." Here he wrote his tragedy "Marie Stuart," under her influence and doubtless materially helped by her knowledge of the Stuart family history.

In Charles' sober moments, he never left the pair alone. His treatment of Louise was increasingly horrible.

At last the climax came—on the night of St. Andrew's Day, when thousands of loyal, but misguided, Scotchmen were secretly drinking the health of "the King over the Water."

Charles deemed it a date whereon to get drunker than usual. In the small hours, when he could no longer guide a glass to his lips, he somehow stumbled upstairs to Louise's bedchamber. She was sound asleep. He fastened his clawlike fingers around her throat and was gleefully strangling her to death when her screams roused the servants. There was a fearful struggle. The servants, with great difficulty, pried loose the madman's grip and got him out of the room and to bed.

Louise was a long time recovering from her fright. When her self-control came back, she decided that life with the "bonny prince" was no longer to be endured.

In a stolen interview, she and Alfieri plotted the details of her escape. They took two friends into their confidence—Signora Orlandini, Louise's companion, and an Irishman named Gegehan.

On the day fixed for the flight, Signora Orlandini breakfasted with Louise and her husband. As they rose from

the table, Louise suggested that they should drive to the Convent of the Bianchetti, to see certain work of the nuns. Charles fell in with the proposal, and they all started out together. At the convent door, they found Mr. Gegehan—by chance, of course. He whispered slyly to Charles that he had "a rare story to tell him"—if they could rid themselves of the ladies for a moment.

Charles lagged behind at once, while his wife quickly ran upstairs, followed by Signora Orlandini.

Presently the prince, having listened to Mr. Gegehan's story—and found it raw rather than rare—became impatient to get rid of the bore. He hurried up the stairs as rapidly as possible and knocked. No one answered. He pounded the door; then kicked with all his might. After he had raised a most unholy din, the abbess opened a grating in the panel and calmly informed him that he could not come in—nor would his wife come out.

"She has fled to the convent for sanctuary," said the abbess, "and here she shall remain."

The baffled husband, mad with rage, bellowed like a bull and tried to tear the door down. But convent doors have a way of holding against the onslaughts of the world, and at last Charles was forced to give in from sheer exhaustion.

Later on, Louise succeeded in getting a legal separation—through the aid of her brother-in-law, Henry of York—and a pension.

After this, she was free to live where she chose. She took a mansion in Rome. Alfieri rushed to her. The happiest years of their lives followed.

With Louise by his side, Alfieri did his best work. He dominated her as Charles could never have done. Together they traveled; then settled for six years in Paris, where society

treated their love with respect and welcomed them.

In 1788, the poor, broken shell of a man who had once been the center of the Stuart hopes died. Louise, in spite of all she had suffered at Charles' hands, wept piteously at his death.

Strangely enough, she and Alfieri never married. Though she loved him with all her heart, she could never forget her "royal" rank. She regarded herself as Queen of England, and was always called "*ma chère souveraine*" by her friends and "your majesty" by her servants.

After her husband's death, she visited England with Alfieri. She was presented at court and introduced everywhere as "Princess of Stolberg."

Finally the pair settled in Florence. Louise never relaxed her semblance of regal state. Her plate was engraved with the royal arms of England, and she had a throne in her anteroom.

Her devotion to Alfieri was often put to the test, for his incomparable and unconscious selfishness made him hard to live with. He had radical socialistic views, too, that always threatened to get him into trouble, though they never quite did.

"He was born to do, and he could only write," says Madame De Staël. "Alfieri wanted to march through literature to a political goal."

Finally, in 1803, he died. Louise was never the same again.

"Happiness has disappeared out of the world for me," she wrote to a friend soon after his death.

"All that Alfieri had to give he gave to her," says a historian. "And she was his devoted companion, his trumpeter, his press agent. Perseus never spared his Andromeda. If she had been delivered from the dragon"—Charles—"she was nevertheless chained to the rock—the rock of Alfieri's selfishness."

After his death, Louise turned her whole attention to founding a salon. Her home on the Lung 'Arno in Florence became the meeting place of all literary and fashionable Europe.

Love affairs she had as long as she lived, but, with one exception, they were passing attachments. The one exception was the painter, François Xavier Fabre.

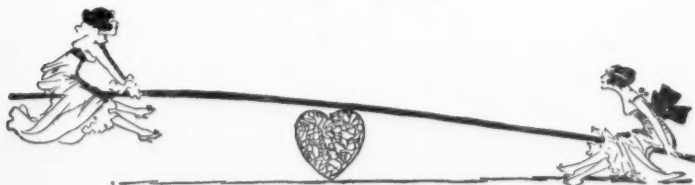
Fabre was narrow, discreet, cold, yet she was fond enough of him to leave him all her belongings when she died. These belongings included, besides her own art treasures, all of Alfieri's books and relics and all her Stuart relics. With characteristic lack of sentiment, Fabre turned them over to his native town—Montpellier; thereby founding the "Musée Fabre."

Louise and Alfieri are buried in one grave, in the Church of Santa Croce at Florence, between the tombs of Macchiavelli and Michelangelo. Alfieri, years earlier, had written a beautiful epitaph for his super-woman:

"To Vittorio Alfieri she was above all things beloved."

Fabre's inch-wide, jealous soul did not permit the tribute to be cut into the tomb.

Next Month: Tzu-H'si.





The Invisible Barrier

By Du Vernet Rabell

'Author of "The Woman Michael Married,"
"Not Even a Sinner," etc.

FRANCES knelt on the floor beside the big armchair and took one of Alden's ice-cold hands in hers.

"Oh, Carey, Carey," she begged, "you mustn't take it like this! I would never have told you if I'd thought that you'd go to pieces!" She touched her lips to his hand. "You must love me a great deal."

The man took his hand away and pressed it to his eyes.

"Yes—yes, I love you, of course. But think of my work—think of me!"

"I am thinking of you. I think of you all the time."

Alden rose and began to pace the floor in quick, nervous strides.

"If I lose this chance—if I don't go to Japan now—I'm finished as far as Cortwright is concerned. And he's right, Frances. It is better to finish my book over there. The atmosphere in which I will live—" He stopped with a hopeless gesture of his nervous hands. "But now—this!"

Frances nodded her fair head in eager assent.

"Of course—of course! And you mustn't think of me at all. Oh, why, why did I tell you?" And her eyes, which had been as steady as blue flames, filled with sudden tears.

Alden made a tolerant gesture as he patted her bowed head.

"Oh, a girl goes to pieces. She would, in a case like this. I understand, Frances." He hesitated a moment and then kissed her. He kissed her again and then, putting his arms about her, drew her head to his shoulder. "Don't

cry, dear. I'm going to stand by you. We—we'll be married, and you shall go with me."

She smiled at him through her tears.

"You dear, impractical boy! Why, that is not to be thought of!"

"Then I'll marry you before I go."

The girl shook her head firmly.

"No, Carey. You must go to your work free—absolutely free."

"Of course you're right. An artist, any artist, must tread the road alone. He must be free."

Frances freed herself from his arms and rose to her feet. She walked to the mirror over the fireplace and patted her hair into place and powdered her nose. Then she turned with a smile, proclaiming that the storm had passed.

"There! See, Carey! I'm quite all right. Now, there'll be no more tears or scenes like this. They're bad for you. We must think of you always—you and your book. Go down to Mr. Cortwright this morning and tell him that you're ready to leave at once. Get it over."

"But, Frances, I don't see how I can! No, I can't! The whole thing is impossible! Why, I'll be gone for months—a whole year, most likely!"

The girl smiled bravely, but somehow, as she stood there, her small head held high, her blue eyes steady, and her lips fixed in their heroic curve, she looked young—pitifully young, like a child full of courage, the courage that knows nothing, or rather understands nothing, of what lies ahead.

"What's a year, Carey? Why, dear-est, we have our lives before us for living—and loving." She twined both arms about his neck and held him close, looking up into his eyes, her own wide with the tears she would not shed. "And you will love me—think of me always—won't you, Carey?"

He kissed her with sudden tenderness.

"Love you? How can a man help it? You're so fine and understanding—such a wonderful little pal. That's why—I hate to go—"

"But you are going—you are going!"

"But, Frances—what about you? What will you do?"

"Oh, I'll be all right. I'm banking everything on Goritzo." She started suddenly and snatched up the paper from the desk. "Why, Carey—Carey, *this* is the fifteenth! I was to sing for him *to-day*! This—this other thing put everything else out of my head! But—oh, Carey—I can't—I can't!"

"Oh, come now, girl! Who's going to pieces now?"

She clapped her hands convulsively.

"I know—I know! And I must not! Everything depends on this. But how can I sing—to-day?"

Carey again took up his pacing. He tossed his hands above his head.

"Oh, it's damnable—the whole thing! It's knocked us both higher than a kite!"

She ran to him.

"No, it hasn't. We get moments of panic—that's all. But you mustn't. It's not so bad for me. My affairs are a gamble, anyhow. But you—you have already arrived. Your book is waited for, expected. Nothing must stand in its way."

She turned and picked up her coat, where she had flung it over the back of the tall, carved chair. She held it out to him with a smile.

"I'm going now," and as he slipped

it over her shoulders, "The longer I stay, the harder it'll be to say good-by. So"—she stood on tiptoe and, clasping his handsome head, pressed her face close to him—"so good-by, Carey. Oh, darling—I love you so! But—but I'm quite all right. Really I am. See—I'm smiling. And I'm not afraid—not really. But, Carey," and her beautiful voice broke, "keep loving me—keep loving me!" And she turned blindly and ran from the room.

As Alden boarded the train, twenty-four hours later, a note was handed to him:

I want you to go away happy. I sang for Goritzo, and he had me sign a contract at once. Think—*think*, Carey! I am to sing this season—*here* at the *opera*! When I left you, I felt that I could never sing another note—singing was for happiness. Well, I sang the "Mater Doloroso"—and I sang as I never have before. It came from my heart, as true music must. The sad beauty of it seemed to tear my very soul.

After the season is closed here, Goritzo wants me to go to South America. But that, of course, is impossible. I am not sorry. I am almost happy. I am, Carey—and not afraid. Love me always, dearest. It will keep me brave and happy. FRANCES.

For five months, Carey heard regularly from Frances. She sent him her flattering newspaper notices, and told him happily of her triumphs. Then her letters changed in tone. They became frightened, reproachful, bitter—and then they ceased abruptly. Carey wrote and wrote. He knew that she received his letters, but he couldn't make her answer them. At first he worried, then he grew angry, and finally he was puzzled and curious. What had become of Frances?

Then—his book was finished. He was back in New York. His friends flocked to congratulate him, and newspapers begged interviews. And then one day, after he had been home a little over a week, he received a letter from Frances—just a few lines, happy, joyous. But Alden read between the

lines, as he felt she had meant him to, and his heart missed a beat, and his hands grew so unsteady that the paper rattled in his fingers.

She wrote that she was living very quietly, about thirty miles out of New York, in a dear old house that she had found, and that she would send a car in for him that evening.

Alden read the note, reread it, and then, taking his hat and stick, walked out onto the Avenue. He must think, think. He must come to some definite conclusion before he saw Frances. He tried to arrange his thoughts in orderly array, to take them out one by one, ponder over them, select some, reject others, coolly, rationally. He began with his meeting with Frances two years ago.

He had heard her sing at a dinner. She had been dressed in blue—the deep, vivid blue of the tropical night—and she had been very beautiful. He had called on her a few days later. Then they had motored out into the country. It was springtime, and the apple blossoms lay on the ground like rose-tinted snow. There had been walks through the Park, dinners—and finally he had come to the point where the thought of this slim, sweet-voiced girl filled every nook and cranny of his mind. He couldn't work; the longing for her had crowded out every other desire in his heart. One night after the opera—"La Bohème" that theme of pure love distilled into music—he had taken her into his arms, held her close, and kissed her. There had been two months of perfect happiness—and then the deluge. And now—what?

Couldn't things go on as before? Couldn't they love and be happy? But he shook his head. He was not at all sure that he loved Frances, to begin with, and to end with, things never went on as before. He didn't know why—it seemed hard that they shouldn't—but somehow they never did.

He drew a deep breath. There was only one thing for him to do. He would marry Frances. He sat down on a bench in Washington Square. Oh, how could he marry? Marrying meant giving up his freedom—and freedom meant everything to a man in his position. His work would go to pieces, but—here he shrugged, and his lips twisted in a bitter smile—but it couldn't be helped. It was a matter of honor—of duty.

That night, when the motor called for him, it was raining. All the way out, the rain swished against the windows of the car, and he could see the branches of the trees tossing about when the lightning flashed. He glanced about the interior of the car. He wondered if it belonged to Frances. Oh, of course not! What on earth was she doing, living 'way out here in the wilderness? Her work—what of that? Had it gone to pieces after her brief season of triumph? He shrugged. Probably; it often happened.

The car turned in between high iron gates and drew up before the house. There were lights in several of the windows, and as the door opened to admit him, he heard some one singing. He recognized Frances' voice, but her tones had mellowed, deepened. Then the maid led him to a lighted room at the end of the hall, drew back the portières, announced him, and left him standing on the threshold.

It was a beautiful room—rose and gray. The walls were covered with gray brocade, and all along one side were low shelves of books. There were bowls of gladiolas on the low table, and a rose-shaded lamp stood beside the grand piano. A fire was burning in the fireplace, and a couch, a deep couch, was drawn up before it. And over the back he saw Frances' blond head. She turned and smiled at him.

"Come in," she said.

As Alden walked slowly across the

room, he tried to pull himself together. He could feel a nerve quivering in his cheek, and his throat felt choked with sand. But he got his greeting over somehow, and found himself seated on the couch beside Frances. She was radiant, her blue eyes glowing with happiness.

"And your book!" she was saying. "Such a success! I read it, and was so proud!"

Alden smiled. Yes, the success of his book was gratifying. Already he was at work on its successor. Cortwright was delighted, and people were showering him with attention. But—and here he shrugged in a world-weary fashion—he wasn't going to let his fame go to his head. So many men did. Finally he turned to Frances.

"And your work?" he said. "Tell me of that."

She lifted one shoulder in its covering of rose-colored *crêpe*.

"But—what is there to tell? I sing—the public is pleased—" She broke into a peal of laughter. "You know, this indifference, this air of boredom, is all pose. At heart, I am delighted with my success!" Slowly her smile faded, and her eyes widened and seemed about to fill with tears. "And I am so thankful, so humbly grateful for it! It came to me at a time when I needed something—needed it so badly!"

"Yes. Yes, I know." He hesitated, flushing. "Would you care to tell me about—about it, Frances? Or"—he threw back his head, like one endeavoring to throw off an unpleasant memory—"or do you feel, as I do, that it's best to let the dead past bury its dead."

"No—no, I don't feel that way."

So Frances began to talk softly, dreamily, as one relating a fairy tale. She reached the point where her letters to Alden ceased.

"I was frightened—resentful. But afterward—I was just happy. All the wonderful dreams I had ever had

seemed sailing home like beautiful boats on a sapphire sea—my voice, my success, my son—and you."

Alden looked into her softly luminous eyes.

"I—I can't seem to find anything to say."

She nodded her fair head slowly.

"I know. It's too deep for just words." She waited a moment and then asked softly: "Do you want to see him?"

Alden recoiled.

"No—no—that is, not yet. You see, Frances," he hurried on nervously, "it's all so new. I can't seem to grasp things—yet. Wait—"

Frances had been looking at him curiously.

"But how can you wait?" she broke in now.

Alden tapped the arm of the couch, his fingers twitching.

"There's so much to be discussed. We must make plans, plans for the future." He stopped and drew a long breath, like one about to sink into bitter, cold waters. "We will be married—of course."

She nodded, her eyes alight; there was a hint of lightness, almost of mischief, in her tones.

"I know. You want to claim your son. All your talk of waiting was just sham. Am I not right? Still, I'm not selfish. You may share him. And naturally we must plan for the future. Yes, yes, of course we must be married."

Alden picked up an ivory paper cutter, his hands fingering its intricate carving.

"Yes, I thought it all out this morning. My duty—" He stopped before the look that leaped into her eyes.

"What—what did you say?"

"I said a man's duty—"

She leaned forward and for a moment stared at him intently.

"Duty—duty? I don't understand

you, Carey." She shook her head.

"What has duty to do with it?"

Alden laughed shortly.

"Well, considering everything, surely I may use the word."

Her eyes were full of incredulity.

"Duty! But surely it is not merely a matter of duty! Don't you want to—"

"Of course I want to. But isn't that, after all, quite beside the question?"

She pressed her fingers to her temple.

"No, it isn't beside the question. It is the question. You say you want to marry me—but do you? Do you still care for me—do you?" Her eyes, suddenly dark, met his. "Carey, you don't want to marry me. Your kiss, when you came in to-night, was hesitating, perfunctory. That was duty. You don't care any more. No," and she laughed, a short, pain-edged laugh, "you are too busy thinking of duty."

"Frances, don't take that tone!"

"Why not?"

"Why—why, we are going to be married. Everything will be all right."

"Will it? How do you know? Do you think everything could be all right—with that barrier always between us?"

"What barrier? What do you mean?"

"The thought that you had done your duty. It would be always there, an invisible barrier to happiness—even to love."

He tried to take her hand again.

"Frances, you are foolish!"

"I am not foolish! I'm gaining in wisdom with each passing moment."

"But don't you see—you must marry me?"

Frances started to answer. Then, from above her head, came a tiny wail that checked the answer on her lips. For a moment she listened; then slowly she smiled. It wasn't exactly a smile; her lips curved upward, but her eyes remained grave.

"Yes, you are right," she said slowly. "I must marry you. I, too, have—my duty."

There was a long, tense pause.

"And when," Alden ventured presently, "when do you want to be married?"

"When?" she repeated dully.

"Yes. We'd better make it soon. There's nothing to delay us. Shall we say to-morrow—or perhaps the first of next week?"

She nodded and turned away.

"Yes—yes, any time that you arrange." She raised her head, listening. "Do you mind—going now?"

Two days later, Alden, with all the arrangements made for an immediate marriage, called up the house in Westchester. A maid answered the telephone. She said that madam was away; she had taken an apartment in town and was at her country home only for the week-ends. The opera season had opened—No, sir—madam had left no message.

Alden hung up the receiver with a feeling of intense anger. What was he to do next? He supposed he would have to wait until he heard from Frances. Certainly this was an odd, unreasonable, inconsiderate thing for her to do. He thought of trying to reach her through Goritzo. Then his lips tightened. No, why should he? So he waited.

He waited for a week, and he might have waited even longer if one day he had not met Frances in front of Tiffany's. She was tripping across the sidewalk toward her limousine. He stopped her.

"Frances!"

She turned, and her eyes lit up with a flashing smile.

"Why, Carey—I thought you were lost!"

"You thought I was lost! Frances, why haven't you let me hear from you?"

Her eyes widened ingenuously.

"Didn't you hear? No? Well——"
She made a swift gesture. "Come—
ride uptown with me, and I'll tell you."

Once in the car, she turned.

"Now you know—I cannot understand! I wrote you—but surely I did!"
She shook her bright head. "But I am so busy—rehearsals, fittings, you know. And my secretary, she is new and unbelievably stupid!"

Alden was staring at her in amazement. Why—why, her clothes, her manner, even her speech, were all changed. She was dressed in a crimson cloth suit, with a high collar and cuffs of seal. She looked dashing; yes, beautiful, of course—but so different.

"It seems to me," he began stiffly, after he had regained in a measure his composure, "that you're rather casual about things——"

"Casual? *Cher ami*, how so?"

"Well, when a girl is going to be married——"

She interrupted him with a little gust of amused protest:

"Married! But that's just it, dear boy! That's what I wrote you. Oh, and you have no idea how nicely I explained it! Then—well, I dare say I forgot to mail it. I do that sort of thing." And she gestured gayly.

"Yes, yes, so you said. But what did you explain?"

"Why—that we are not going to be married."

Alden started.

"Not going to be married!"

"No. You see," and she touched his arm, "marriage—well, marriage is really impossible for me."

Alden looked at her as if he thought she had been suddenly bereft of her reason. She laughed with sweet amusement at his expression.

"Oh, of course you can't understand. You are not the artist. You write, I know"—she gave a small, deprecatory shrug—"but that is not the same. Now

I—— Well, it is too hampering, this marriage game."

"I never saw such a change in my life!" Alden exclaimed.

"That's it," Frances explained quickly. "We are like that, we children of temperament. We change—like this to-day, like that to-morrow. That is why marriage—that sane, placid state—is not for us."

"You didn't think that way the other night."

"The other night! Why, that might have been a thousand years ago! Since then, I have come to town—I have sung—— By the by, did you hear me? I meant to let you know, but things of importance—— Always it is that way. My managers, my friends, make much of me. They tell me that I am the great *diva*—and I believe, of course. Even my speech—— You know, I sing in Italian and French, and my friends, so many of them, are of those countries, so I rarely speak English. You see?" And she finished her explanation with a comprehensive gesture.

"Then—then," Alden stammered, "what am I to think?"

"But, dear man, do I direct your thoughts?"

"Is everything to be over between us?"

"How banal!" And she laughed sweetly. "But no! Why should that be? We can still be friends, motor together, have tea occasionally. I make a charming friend."

"Yes—yes, I want to be your friend." Then, "Oh, Frances, you must reconsider! You must marry me!"

She shook her head, and the drops of jet in her small ears swung from side to side.

"No, no, and again no! *Mon ami*, you seem to forget. I have my career to think of!"

"But," Alden added, with purposeful gentleness, "you have also your son to think of."

"Ah—am I not thinking of him?"

"Are you?"

"Yes—of course."

"But my name——"

"*Your name!* Why, dear friend, my name means a thousand times more than your name will ever mean!"

Alden was still in a daze when the car stopped before his apartment. He didn't understand; the game seemed to have gone beyond him, to have been taken completely from his hands. He sat down before the fire to think, and gradually his bewilderment left him, and a feeling of resentment took its place. Well, then, he thought presently, let Frances take the game into her own hands; let her play it to suit her erratic self. But, by George, she should play it alone!

But he didn't keep to his resolution. Two nights later, he heard Frances in "Thais." Everything in him thrilled to her wonderful golden voice, her beauty, her compelling charm. He wrote her a note. He begged her to see him that night—if only for a moment.

She answered graciously, but regretfully. No, she was engaged that night, but very soon—next week, she thought—he might come to tea. And there was nothing for him to do but to wait with what patience he could. But he sent her roses.

At the end of the following week, she wrote, inviting him to have tea with her. He went curiously, eagerly, and she sat behind a silver tea service and played at being domestic. She talked to him of her plans, her future, what she would sing, and when; she was bright and cleverly amusing; she told him interesting incidents in the careers of her friends; she made him laugh over her version of a popular song. The time flew, and when she dismissed him sweetly, he begged to come again.

"I feel as if I were meeting you all over again," he said, laughing.

"Oh, no," she answered. "Nothing

can ever happen all over. The hours may be happy, they may be sad, but time never returns any of them to us—that we may live them again."

Frances was young, beautiful, successful—and consequently in much demand, yet she managed to find time for Alden with more or less regularity. But she made many demands on him; she interfered with his work, and she kept his nerves very much on edge.

At first she merely stimulated him, interested him, amused him with her vivacity. He had none of the love he had felt for her two years ago. That phase of their affair, he told himself, would never return. But as the weeks went by, he began to doubt this.

The time came when a quick turn of Frances' head, the touch of her hand, a soft note in her beautiful voice, could set him listening to the pipes of Pan and awaken wild dreams in his heart.

"You are a true daughter of genius," he told her bitterly one day. "You love no one but yourself."

"And why not?" she laughed at him.

"Why not indeed? You are lovely enough, maddening enough——"

"*Mon ami*," she interrupted wickedly, "are you, then, making love to me?"

"I want to. But you don't believe in love."

"No? And how do you know that?"

"Didn't you tell me only last week that——"

"Oh, hear him! Always he is reminding me of the things I said yesterday—last week—when I have forgotten them! Is not what I say to-day enough?"

"It must be, I suppose," he replied moodily.

"Now he pouts," Frances teased. She bent her fair head toward him. "And does he, then, want to love——"

"Don't I almost hate you when you torment me?"

"Hate—love—they are much the same."

"And whichever I feel is of small importance to you."

She shrugged and yawned delicately.

"You may love me—if it pleases you."

Alden looked at her, a certain wistfulness in his eyes.

"Does love, then—mean nothing to you?"

Something seemed to drop from her, something intangible—her air of sophistication, her attitude of boredom. Her eyes grew deeper in expression, and her smile more gentle.

"Love?" she repeated slowly. "Does love mean nothing to me?" She turned with sudden swiftness. "And what does it mean to you?"

"Everything," he answered simply; then, after a quick glance, he hurried on, eager to take advantage of her softened mood: "And, Frances, don't you see what it might mean to you?"

"Tell me," she begged softly.

"Why—it will mean marriage—a home—protection——"

"Protection?" she interrupted him. "What do you mean by protection?"

"Why," he explained, "the protection of an assured position. As my wife, you will——"

"But I have an assured position." She drew herself up. "The position of Fanchon Frances is unassailable."

"Of course—in a certain world, the world of bohemians, of artistic folk. But in the real world, the world in which I move, the world whose doors I can open to you——"

She stopped him with a swift gesture.

"Don't go on! Oh, don't go on! You've spoiled everything! You always spoil everything! I—I—— Oh, I hate you! Go away! Stop looking at me like that—and go away!"

He stood above her, his lips pressed tight together.

"You may hate me to-day—or think

you do—but once you loved me. And," he added with rising passion, "by everything that's holy, you will love me again!"

Frances let him finish, and then deliberately stretched out her arm and touched her bell.

"End of act two," she drawled. "Run along now, *mon ami*. I must practice."

One night, just before the closing of the opera season, Alden telephoned Frances. He had not been able to see her alone for almost two weeks, and he was growing desperate. He had done everything that lay in his power to awaken the love he knew Frances had once felt for him, but so far his task seemed hopeless. He knew that, with a man, there is nothing so dead as a dead passion, but a woman—ah, that was different. Always, under the gray of the embers, there was still the glow of the fire that had been—faint, perhaps, but a breath sometimes would revive it.

As for him, it was not the bringing to life of old flames. What he now felt for Frances was a totally different emotion from that which he had experienced before. It wasn't the reviving of an old love; it was the birth of a new. In himself, for the first time, he was feeling the mounting flames of love—the great, glorious love about which he wrote so glibly and so successfully. He felt he must have Frances. He wanted her—and he needed her. With her beauty as his inspiration, were there any heights his eagerly ambitious feet could not achieve?

And there were days, moments, when she was kind, almost kind, when her mocking eyes softened, and her beautiful voice became as softly caressing as a love song. To-day, for instance, when finally he heard her reply at the telephone, her tones seemed to grow sweeter, more gentle.

"I have missed you," she said.

"And I have nearly gone mad!" he told her.

"Poor Carey!"

"When can I see you?" he begged.

"Why, any time," she replied, as if her time were a thing entirely at his command.

"Then listen, Frances," he pleaded eagerly, a sudden thought taking form in his brain, "will you dine with me to-night? Just we two alone?"

There wasn't a moment's hesitation.

"Yes, Carey—I'd love it. These many people lately—they have bored me."

He hung up the receiver with shaking hands. She had never been quite so kind as this before.

He reserved a table at Voisin's, where he and Frances had often dined in the old days. He ordered the things she used to like—grilled chicken, flag-olets, a green salad, and a chocolate mousse. And they would have coffee in his apartment. As his mind turned backward, he found his heart leaping and his breath catching in his throat.

He called for Frances at seven. She was waiting for him. She wore a simple serge frock, with a girlish fox fur over her shoulders, and she seemed to have left behind, in the foyer of her hotel, the manner of the petted prima donna, to be just a warm-eyed, fresh-voiced girl, happy to be with him.

They walked down the Avenue, and he bought her a bunch of jonquils. He wanted to buy orchids, but she shook her head.

"No, jonquils. I love them to-day. They're so fresh and sweet. They're at the beginning of things."

He prayed that he would not be stupid, tongue-tied, at dinner, as he found himself so often, these days, with Frances. He prayed that she wouldn't tantalize him, make him lose his temper, or torment him into sullen silence. But none of these things occurred. He was at his best; he felt it. He felt her re-

sponse, the unaffectedly merry note in her laughter, the eager light in her eyes, as if she were on the threshold of some breathless adventure.

"And we are to have coffee in your rooms! Oh, Carey, how wonderful of you to have thought of it! And you will light the fire and sit on the fur rug with your head against my knee—And they say we cannot relive the old hours! They don't know, do they—boy?"

And Alden shook his head, a pulse throbbing in his throat.

"Will you sing to me?" he asked later, as she finished her coffee.

She shook her head.

"No—no, I am not Madame Fanchon Frances to-night. I am Frances Kennedy—the girl you used to know."

He turned swiftly and caught her in his arms. His moment had come.

"The girl I used to know! The girl I used to love!"

"And now?" she questioned, raising her eyes.

"And now—why, now I know I never loved her—because I didn't know what love was! Kiss me, darling!"

After a moment, she leaned back in his arms, looking up into his eyes.

"You do love me, don't you, Alden? You do?"

"Of course. Ah, Frances, how could you have made me wait so long for my happiness? How could you have waited so long for yours?" And he kissed her again.

She stirred restlessly in his embrace.

"What is it?" he asked, touching the golden waves of her hair with his lips.

"I don't know. I wonder—I wonder"—her voice grew uncertain—"I wonder if I have waited too long."

"One of your odd, enigmatic speeches. I don't know what you mean—but why worry? We love each other, and we will be happy. Think what a glorious future there is before us!"

"Yes, yes," she assented with deter-

mined eagerness. "Tell me of that. I won't worry about—about— Oh, I don't know what it is—but—" She laughed happily. "Paint me a pretty picture of that future."

"We will wander from one end of the world to the other, like two children in a garden of wonder—Japan, South Africa, the Orient. The setting of my new book is to be India. And you will help me with it. Your hand will hold the lamp—"

"But, Carey—just a minute, dear! There is my work. I can't go running about like that, you know."

He laughed fondly.

"Your work! Why, dear, all that is past. What was it, anyway? Singing for a few thousand people! And of course I wouldn't dream of letting you go on. I could not be known as the husband of Fanchon Frances. How could you suppose such a thing? Now you, dear—why, to be known as the wife of Carey Alden, that is a different matter."

Frances shook her golden head.

"I wouldn't give up my singing. I couldn't."

"I don't want you to. You shall sing for me. Your voice will be my inspiration. I'll set it to words that will live long after you and I are dust beneath the willows."

Frances touched his hand gently.

"But, dear—don't you understand? Surely you love me too much to ask me to give up my singing. Why, it would be like taking a dearly loved gift from me. Surely you wouldn't do that. My career means as much to me as yours does to you."

He smiled, a patient smile, and made a quick gesture, as if brushing away a typically feminine illusion.

"Oh, no, it doesn't, dear. What is a career to a woman, after all? Only a makeshift for happiness, a stepping-stone to her real destiny."

"And that is—"

"Marriage, of course. In making the man she loves happy, a woman finds her own true happiness."

Frances freed herself, with a sudden burst of laughter, a high, ringing peal.

"And all winter I've been working for this! I've played a part to make you love me! When you came back, I loved you, Carey—more than you will ever know, more than you could understand. I loved you so much that I wouldn't let you marry me until I had taught you to love me. I had to do that or stop loving you. And I couldn't stop—I couldn't! For women"—her lips twisted into a bitter smile—"aren't like men when they love. They love, God pity them, with their eyes wide open to the selfishness, the meanness, the unworthiness, of the men they love."

He had his arm about her again.

"Oh, Frances, why all this—now? You love me. You admit it—"

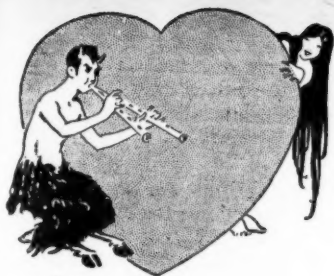
"But I don't! I don't!" she interrupted with sudden eagerness. "I don't love you—not any more! I'm sure of it—sure! When you took me in your arms a moment ago and kissed me, I was afraid that this was so—and now, with your arms about me, *now I know*. It's—it's odd, isn't it?" Her voice quivered as one who sees a long-loved dream fade in the glow of sunset. "It's odd that in teaching you to fall in love with me, I have fallen—out of love—with you."

"Frances," Carey warned her sternly, "you're trifling with your life's happiness. In marrying me—"

"Carey, Carey, I wouldn't *dare* marry you! I would sacrifice too much. There would always be that barrier—between us."

"You used that term before. But marrying you now is no longer a duty."

"Ah, yes! But the barrier is still there, and it's name is still duty. But it is no longer your duty to me. No, Carey, you feel you need *me* now. It has become your duty—to yourself."



Poor Pierrot

By Helen Woljeska



IT was a hot Sunday evening in July.

The lights in the Chinese lanterns flickered mockingly, shedding a fantastic glow over the motley crowd that filled the studio. There were men in evening clothes and men in sport suits; Dorothy received her guests in a stunning, sleeveless dinner gown; Lolo had run up from her apartment on the floor below in a ravishing rose-colored negligee; while Vanda, who had just arrived, wore a street costume, all white, from the flaring hat to the dainty suede ties.

Slender and pale, she stood against the dark door, greeted with enthusiasm by all present.

"But what makes you so late?" asked Dorothy reproachfully, as she clasped her in a big, impetuous embrace. "You look all tired out! And you promised to come back early enough to take a nap before supper!"

Vanda smiled.

"Ask Muir," she said, pointing to her escort. "He insisted on missing every trolley and ferry we had to take on our way home. But we had a glorious day, all the same!"

The young playwright bowed.

"Since she's forgiven me, I'm sure you won't be hard-hearted, Miss Gordon?"

Dorothy shook his hand in a warm grasp.

"Far be it from me!" she laughed.

"And you had to make all the sandwiches yourself?" Vanda ruefully remembered her sins of omission.

"No. Scotty came early, and has been working like a slave. He's getting all sorts of fascinating things ready in there!"

She pointed to the kitchenette, where a small, busy figure in white ducks and pale-green shirt waist was glimpsed beyond the half-open door.

"If Scotty is cooking, all is well!"

Vanda took off her large hat and fluffed the copper-colored hair crushed to her temples. Standing before the little mirror, she saw her irregular face as a blurred ivory oval with heavy-lidded eyes and drooping red mouth, against a dark background of moving colors and shapes.

"I look rotten," she thought, as she applied the powder pad. Then she shrugged her shoulders and turned away.

"Miss Vanda"—Floy-Jones approached her, his silver case extended—"have a cigarette."

Vanda installed herself among the cushions of the window seat. A cooling breeze lazily floated up from the light-dotted Hudson, and in the violet evening sky, stars began to sparkle.

"This is the time of day—or night—when the city looks most beautiful to me," she said dreamily.

"I wonder that you never painted it," mused Floy-Jones.

"So do I," Vanda admitted. "The truth is, I never know why I do or don't do a thing. I just drift—and afterward try to tack some grandiose or virtuous reason on to my subconscious acts. It's quite disgusting!"

He laughed.

"That's because you are ultra-modern. Doesn't Shaw proclaim that we moderns have dethroned reason in favor of will—subconscious will, if you like?"

"Does he? I no longer read the blattant Mr. Shaw. He always writes at the top of his voice—used to make my ears hurt."

"I am sure he'd be infinitely sorry if he knew."

Vanda turned around quickly, looked into his face, then laughed.

"Can you never be serious?" she complained.

"Serious? I hope not. It must be so comical for some greater beings to see us take ourselves seriously! I don't want to add to their hilarity."

"Oh, but you are weird! Greater beings?" She looked behind her fearfully. "Let's remain in this world for the present, please, among us mortals!"

The half-whimsical, half-depraved Pierrot face of Muir looked at her out of the background's colored gloom.

"Is it not strange that an old *viveur* like Floy-Jones should have such mystical fancies?" he cried. "You'll end in a Catholic monastery yet—or an insane asylum, Floy!"

Floy-Jones examined his well-polished nails with a quizzical smile.

"There might be worse places," he suggested.

"Muir," Vanda called over, "come and sit down beside me and talk to me. This man has made me feel positively uncanny!"

The young man followed her invitation. Looking deep into her eyes, he said:

"I'm flattered that you want to see more of me, after having borne with

my company since eleven this morning."

Vanda blushed slightly.

"I suppose I'm a woman of habit," she said. "I become used to people."

"A woman of habit?" Floy-Jones looked up. "Not you, my dear young woman!" With long, slender fingers, he meditatively stroked his well-modeled bald head. "I know many women, and they all fall naturally into one of three classes: women of habit, women of pleasure, women of passion—in other words: wives, harlots, *grandes amou-reuses*."

"And I?" asked Vanda.

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Can you tell me just what is the difference between pleasure and passion?" the beautiful Lolo called across from the couch on which she sat, surrounded by admirers.

"In pleasure, you keep yourself; in passion, you lose yourself," Muir answered in his place.

Lolo's charming face was twisted into a grimace. But Floy-Jones nodded assent.

"However," he said, with a bow to Lolo, "every type is beautiful—if the woman is beautiful." And his eyes told her that she was.

"Those men," thought Vanda, "when they speak of love, know what they are talking about. And Lolo, who is married—and sometimes I think that even Dorothy— But I—I— Dreams! Only dreams! No facts to go by. No experiences to grow by. And whose fault is it? My own. I attract men. And then—I freeze them. They become discouraged. They leave. To-day, for instance, when Muir— And I am so fond of him, too! Why can't I love him? Will I never love? But I want to! I want to become truly a woman, truly an artist! The next man who—"

"Dear lady," interrupted Muir, "in

your brown study, you have failed to hear Scotty's shrill call for supper. Do you wish to go to his buffet—or may I wait on you?"

"I'll come." And together they went toward the kitchenette, where Scotty stood beside his accomplished works of culinary art, hot and beaming, and received everybody's compliments and expressions of gratitude.

"By gad, that's some salad!" cried Floy-Jones.

"Try these sandwiches à la Scotty—small, but spicy," Dorothy urged her guests.

Lolo's cavaliers opened some well-iced bottles. All waited on themselves, then retreated to some cushion on the floor.

Vanda found herself beside Doctor Rawlinson. She looked up with pleasure into the thin brown face from which curiously beautiful gray eyes greeted her almost gravely.

"You've been overdoing again?" he asked.

"Oh, don't scold, dear doctor! I'll be such a good patient forever after," she laughed. "You shall yet be proud of me—send out pamphlets with pictures of me before and after your treatment, with the autographed testimony: 'I gained twenty pounds in one month!' Doctor—seriously—don't you think you can make me plump and pretty?"

"That would be a catastrophe!" cried Muir. "He'd smother the vibrations of your glorious nerves in vulgar fat! There'd be no more morbidly fascinating paintings. Instead of illustrating Swinburne and Baudelaire, you'd crochet doilies! You'd grow complacent and satisfied. I hate satisfied people! I love the tempestuous! Rather than have all this happen, I'd kill the doctor!"

Rawlinson smiled.

"Calm yourself. There's no danger of Miss Novakowska ever growing fat."

"She'd be the first to resent it," Lolo

whispered. "She's hectic—romantic—caresses the idea of an early death. Poor dear!"

Floy-Jones leaned close to Dorothy's magnificent shoulder.

"That physician seems very much interested in Miss Vanda," he whispered down her perfumed corsage.

She nodded.

"But Vanda, I'm afraid, doesn't appreciate him. She'll pick some tailor's dummy, I'm sure. The most unusual woman always chooses a commonplace man."

Floy-Jones shook his head wearily.

"Don't generalize. Leave such pastimes to bespectacled New England spinsters. It doesn't suit your type of beauty, dusky pantheress."

"Would you really kill some one for my sake?" Vanda looked at Muir, teasing, under lowered lids.

"You can count on me as your devoted troubadour," he said, bowing his head. Then, in the secrecy of dark shadows, he seized her hand and pressed it hard. "But I—can I count on you?" he whispered.

His breath brushed her face, and Vanda instinctively recoiled. Then she remembered her resolve. She leaned toward him.

"Perhaps," she sighed. "Perhaps."

II.

When the last of their guests had left, the three young women looked at one another and yawned.

"Unhook me, Lolo, will you please?" said Dorothy, lazily stretching her beautiful arms. "I'm so sleepy!"

After the silk had rustled to the ground, she stood in flesh-colored *cane-zou* and knickerbockers, a sight to delight any sculptor.

"I do wonder why on earth men come to call on us and why we receive them! It seems an imperfect, unsatisfactory kind of affair!" She threw herself full

length on the wide couch, under the huge Chinese lantern of imperial yellow which had given the studio its nickname. "It's one of the famous riddles of the universe."

"Why, no!" With a flourish of perfumed lace billows, Lolo crouched down beside her. "No mystery at all. Simply *flirt*—the substitute for *love* which has grown too strenuous, too expensive for us moderns. Flirt! It stimulates all emotions and satisfies none. What more would you have?"

Dorothy shook her black mane.

"A great deal more! I want everything!" she said vehemently.

"Well—to-morrow Norivau is in town." Lolo's broad smile was quite irrelevantly innocent.

Dorothy gave her a strange look. For a while, both were silent.

Finally Vanda, who had retired to the little bedroom, came back, robed in flowing white, her slender feet bare, her heavy hair hanging below her waist in copper-colored waves. She joined her friends on the couch.

"You look ripping!" said Lolo, with the airs of the connoisseur. "Ecstatic and enervated, like a Burne-Jones virgin!"

Vanda leaned close to her.

"I love you," she murmured dreamily.

"Yes—it's good to have Lolo with us. She just fits!" Dorothy asserted. "How fortunate that her husband isn't jealous!" she added.

"Is he home now?" asked Vanda.

Lolo nodded.

"When he's home, you are out, and when you're home, he's out." Vanda evidently felt distressed.

"Yes, it's an ideal marriage," said Lolo with a broad smile.

"Do you love him?" suddenly asked Vanda.

Lolo looked into the distance.

"Does any one know what love really means? Is it friendship? Is it phys-

ical attraction? Is it neither? Is it both?"

"It is both!" cried Dorothy ardently. "And something besides and beyond! Something ephemeral, mysterious—something that comes and goes as it will—and still it is everything!"

Lolo smiled, a trifle bored.

"Love is something that one of the two feels—and the other acts," she said sententially.

"No—no!" cried Dorothy. "Both feel it! It surges like a wave over both, and carries them off their feet, and drowns them in rapture!"

Vanda sat silent. All she knew about love was secondhand. And already she had passed her twenty-second birthday. Would it always be like that with her? Would she never be able at least to *act* love?

"Let's go to bed," suggested Dorothy. "It's awfully late. And I need eight hours' sleep every night, if I want to keep my looks as long as Ninon de L'enclos kept hers."

Lolo scoffed.

"Pooh—looks! As if they counted! All a woman needs to fascinate is intelligence and passion. The rest can be supplied by the beauty box and any clever dressmaker."

"Easy for you to say," drawled Vanda ruefully. "You're such a raving beauty!"

Lolo shook her head, laughing. Then she jumped off the couch.

"Well, since I'm dismissed, I won't let hubby wait any longer. Good night! Enjoy your beauty sleep!"

And she was gone.

III.

July had abdicated in favor of August, and the Studio of the Yellow Lantern was closed and deserted, while its two owners reveled in the exquisite joys of a Long Island boarding house.

One especially boresome and mos-

quito-haunted evening, Vanda suddenly realized that she had some important shopping to do, and announced to Dorothy that she would spend the next day in town.

"My dear! Why go to town in all this heat?" Dorothy agitated her languid hammock. "It seems suicidal!"

"But," sighed Vanda, "these are things I've been putting off and really must attend to now."

"Can't you possibly wait until we return in September?"

"Quite out of the question." Vanda spoke with earnest finality, while striving hard to suppress the note of exultation in her voice at the thought of a day away from this deadly monotony, back in the multicolored life of the city.

The next morning, she was up at seven. Two hours later, she landed at the Pennsylvania Station.

Vanda was a child of the city. Neither mountain nor ocean could replace to her the potent magic of city life—that delirious atmosphere of aspirations, dangers, and possibilities, in which human passions and talents struggle for existence and for gratification. Never did the sky seem more beautiful and eternal to her than when it served as canopy to the drabs and grays and dolorous browns of a city street. Never did she feel more exquisitely herself, more in harmony with her surroundings, than when in the midst of the feverish futility of city life. Under these conditions, even shopping seemed exhilarating to Vanda that day. And her voice was vibrant with the joy of life when, toward noon, she called up Lolo and invited herself to lunch.

She found Lolo and her husband in the midst of a new honeymoon.

"You see," Lolo explained to her, in the privacy of her cigarette-scented bedroom, "married life is like a caravan trip. Most of it passes through arid, sandy, depressing desert. Only once in a great while does one come upon an

oasis. That happens when, for one reason or another, the man chances to fall in love with you again. Of course it can't last," she added with a queer little smile.

"But you," asked Vanda, who had a feeling of true friendship for Mr. Berkeley, "are you in love with him?"

Lolo shrugged her shoulders.

"I'm a born actress," she said.

"But won't he notice?"

Lolo smiled mysteriously.

"If he did, it would only increase his ardor."

After lunch, when her husband had gone again, Lolo made Vanda lie down for a little while, and they smoked and chatted together. Lolo was an enchantress. She knew how to bewitch her listeners with the perfume of her personality. Her mind was as delicately seductive as her body. In apparently artless talk, she subtly displayed all her wistful charm and mocking graces—her frailty, her tenderness, her daring, her ambition, her passion, and her sorrows. She threw a strange spell over the younger woman. When Vanda left, she felt herself the prey of vague yearnings and deep unrest.

Brooding, troubled, she walked down Broadway. The heat no longer exhilarated her; it dragged her down, accentuated the discord and distress within her. Love—love—Wherever she looked, everybody seemed to love. Only she herself was left out. Would she never know the most intense human experience except by hearsay? Lolo! And Dorothy, too! There could scarcely be a doubt about her relations with Norivau. She alone stood outside the magic circle; she was denied the sacrament of life! And she *wanted* to live—to live like a real woman—to cry, laugh, kiss, love, die—not just paint—paint—paint!

A well-known voice greeted her. With a start, Vanda recognized Muir. All in white, his mocking eyes very

dark in his slender Arab face, he looked more than ever like a Pierrot.

"Well, this is luck!" he cried, wringing her hand. "What brings you back to town? Last Sunday you had no such intention. Or, at least, you never told me."

Vanda smiled.

"The joys of the seaside grew too intense for me. I felt I must stifle unless I could fill my lungs with city air once again."

"You're incorrigible. However, I'm no friend of bucolic boredom myself. Let's have a cup of something somewhere and together praise the city's lurid purple. What shall it be?"

"It's never too hot for a cup of hot tea."

"Very well. Where do you want to go?" He had taken her arm and eagerly looked into her face.

A thought shot up in her mind, vivid, flaming. She realized that Muir's apartment was somewhere in the immediate neighborhood. And before she had time to reconsider, she said lightly:

"Let's go to your rooms."

For a moment, Muir thought he had misunderstood. She felt his grasp tighten on her arm. He leaned closer to read her face. Across her lips a strange smile was wandering, a smile that was almost a confession. But her eyes did not dare meet his.

"You make me very happy," he murmured, still doubtful.

They walked the short distance in silence.

No sooner had the door of the apartment closed behind her than Vanda felt herself horribly miscast for the rôle she had assumed. All her qualities seemed to drop from her. All her self-reliance deserted her. She felt herself bereft of every charm and initiative, utterly helpless and ridiculous.

Muir piloted her through the dark, narrow hall into his small living room, in which he had so often dreamed of

her. Now she stood in its midst, slender and fragile and charmingly embarrassed.

"Won't you take off your hat?" he asked gently.

"I—I can stay but a moment," she stammered.

"But you promised to have some tea."

She remembered the tea. And she remembered her resolve.

"I will take off my hat," she said, with sudden determination, smiling into his eyes. "What a cozy little nest you have! And this is the famous electric samovar you were telling us about! Now show your competence as a host." She tried to hide her confusion under a debonair manner.

Muir was a charming host. He realized her misgivings and tried to make her feel at her ease, give her back her poise. But while he busied himself with the tea things, or showed her his books and prints, his forced gayety followed by brusque silences, the tense expression of his mouth, the somber flame of his eyes, spoke to her of his passion, and his passion only. And before long Vanda felt herself deliciously thrilled in this atmosphere of desire, where everything seemed to caress, to adore her.

After the little repast, they sat side by side on the divan, bent over a book. They were very close to each other. Their hands touched. Their voices failed. Slowly he pushed the book off her lap and clasped her yielding waist. With a troubled sigh, she sank to his breast. Muir's heart beat wildly; his body and soul vibrated with the agony of expectation; his lips strayed over her blouse, her neck, her hair.

With eyes closed, nerves madly thrilled, Vanda submitted, in panic and exultation.

"Is this love? Do I really love now?" she asked herself feverishly.

At first she did not know what to

answer. But when his hands grew more insistent, his breath more feverish, the realization suddenly overwhelmed her that this man was nothing to her—that she did not, could not love him! It tore to shreds the veil of glittering lies with which she had draped the situation. And in utter horror, she recoiled.

He could not misunderstand her gesture of disgust. The kisses froze on his lips. Mutely his black eyes burned a terrible question into her heart.

Vanda laughed evasively, a little hysterically.

His hands fell from her. She arose. "I must catch the four thirty-four," she stammered foolishly.

With an effort, he regained possession of himself.

"You must catch the four thirty-four," he repeated, faintly smiling.

She was standing before the mirror now, fluffing her hair, putting on her hat. He did not see her. His hands twisted a book out of all shape.

Then she turned toward him. She looked him in the face. And he saw that hers was haggard, her eyes brimming, her lips woefully twisted.

"Forgive me!" she whispered. "I've made a dreadful mistake. I am very unhappy."

He bowed low.

Vanda left the apartment hurriedly. She almost ran down the street. But she could not outrun the vision that flitted on before her. It had the tragic eyes, the ironic mouth, of a pale Pierrot face.



MOMENT TRISTE

OUR hands have gathered at the end of day
Pansies, that are for memories, and tall
White lilies by some breached and ruined wall
Where lovers walked and dreamed and once were gay.

A shadow and a semblance! Need we seek
For names to call them by? The flowers fade
Into remembered faces, yet are made
No wistfuller for any word we speak.

The petals of the twilight, one by one,
Close on the world and hide it from our eyes;
A dew of stars upon old gardens lies,
And down to darkness drifts the yellowing sun—
While momentarily along the horizon glows
The heart of evening's last, unscattered rose.

LESLIE NELSON JENNINGS.



The Door

By Nancy Boyd

Author of "Young Love," etc.



CYNTHIA BAINBRIDGE gave me this story because she might not write it herself, for she would like to have done so. She is a novelist of considerable reputation, and, I suppose, has delivered up to her public almost everything that ever happened to her, together with her personal habits—for instance, how many times she brushes her hair at night, and if she eats her breakfast egg from the shell when all alone, or just to make an impression on other people. This particular episode, however, she turned over to me.

It was the summer when nobody went in swimming much on account of the sharks. Cynthia was spending the month of August in a little town on Penobscot Bay, at the sort of hotel that is always smelling of lumber because the proprietor is always "building on," the sort of hotel at which five middle-aged women with one middle-aged man promenade the porch from morning to night as if it were the deck of a ship, or sit in wicker chairs at the top of the steps, watching five little girls with one little boy idly knocking the croquet balls about the lawn—but where the food is good. She had gone up there to write.

The room that had been assigned to Cynthia was a square room, rather large than small, with two good windows facing south, that is to say, overlooking

the croquet ground, the road—a bad road now, rocky and dustless, vacuum-cleaned by automobile tires—and across a quarter mile of open field and blueberry pasture to the very beautiful shore. At night she could count from these windows no less than six light-houses, two that winked and four that did not. In the daytime she could see—and this especially if the wind were in the northwest and the bay very bright and blue—thin yawls and yachts with smokestacks going out and in, and little racing dories with numbers on them, half bottom up in the sun, among which sometimes would be one not numbered, carrying an orange sail.

In the right wall of Cynthia's room, as she stood at the window looking out, was a door, which had once opened into the next room, but which was now boarded up to separate the two. Except for the fact that she had gone up there to write, this door must have held for Cynthia the constant irritating fascination of a fire-alarm box, a smash-me-and-see-what-will-happen quality. Even as it was, she would eye it sometimes from her bed, where, propped up by pillows, it was her custom to do some of her writing, and wish it were not there—wish it in the wall behind her, perhaps, or why not in the next room? But then, of course, it was in the next room, too. She wondered if it annoyed the occupant of that room.

As a matter of fact, it was.

The occupant of the next room was Peter Holloway, an artist of considerable reputation. In the morning he would sit in bed, propped up by both pillows, with his breakfast tray on his knees, and look at the door. Afterward, he would dress and take his easel and his brushes and things and go off up the shore, to be gone all day. But at night, sooner or later, he would return and lie in bed and look at the door.

Sometimes he would hear a typewriter in the next room, one of those little ones, he imagined, going very fast. He thought it was prose, rather than poetry, from the manner in which the carriage ran 'way over to the bell with every line, and from the business like slam at the beginning of the next line. Sometimes he would hear a woman's voice at the telephone, which seemed to be ringing nearly all the time, but the conversations, always very brief, were always concluded just before he could be certain what kind of voice she had.

However, he felt reasonably assured that he would not like her voice—that it would prove to be too low or too cold or something, perhaps just too indisputably real, too separate and distinct a quantity. Peter Holloway was somehow of the conviction that a man's voice should be deep and ringing, a child's voice sweet and shrill, and a woman's unobtrusive.

It was true that the telephone rang incessantly. There was a thin girl with straight red hair and large teeth who played a mean, swift game of tennis; a smug victor she was, and a sullen loser. Cynthia hated her, and she was always calling up. There was a woman who had spent two weeks in London, and who was now possessed of an offensive diction, a stark and cautious British accent, quite unaccompanied by the lovely, cool fluency of British speech. She loved to talk, especially

about art and understanding and her soul and Cynthia's soul, and how wonderful it was that they felt the same way about so many things; and excepting when she was tapping at Cynthia's door, holding delicately by its stem some new kind of wild flower, the vocabulary of whose anatomy—stamen, calyx, pistil, pollen, and so forth—fell naked from her tongue, she was always calling up.

But more irritating to Cynthia than her own telephone, which she could at least answer and silence for a time, was the telephone in the room of Peter Holloway, which rang inexorably, interminably, outrageously, and Peter Holloway himself off up the beach, out of hearing.

"Good Lord!" cried Cynthia Bainbridge, one foggy Tuesday morning in the middle of August, rising frantically from her typewriter and running her fingers through her hair. "Why doesn't he leave word in the office he's never in his room? Why can't they dope it out for themselves after ten days saying, 'They don't answer—they don't answer—they don't answer'? Oxen! Oh, stop, I say! Stop ringing!"

With sudden resolution, she went to her mirror, powdered her nose, and put in some hairpins.

"You wait!" she said. "I'll fix you!" And she went out and down the hall at a good pace, with her hands over her ears.

"There's a man in 207 whose telephone rings all the time," she said to the clerk, "and something's got to be done about it. He never answers it, and it rings all the time. It's driving me crazy! Can't you cut the wires or something? I'd have done it myself ages ago, only the door is locked."

"Why, no, Miss Bainbridge," the boy said tolerantly, "we can't exactly do that. We shall have to speak to the occupant of the room about the matter."

"Oh, don't you see? You can't do that!" cried Cynthia. "You can't speak to him about it! He's always out! That's why it does no good to pound on the wall or throw shoes or anything! You've just got to do something about it yourself, and this moment! It's ringing now. I left it ringing. I could hear it all down the hall. And I won't go back to my room until the thing is strangled!"

"I'm sorry," said a young man who some moments ago had entered quietly from the porch and was standing in the doorway with some letters in his hand, "very sorry that my telephone disturbs you. We will have the wires cut at once." He turned to the clerk. "See to it," he said, "that the wires are cut at once."

Cynthia flushed.

"Oh, please!" she said. "Please! Are you the man in 207? I beg your pardon. But it's been ringing all the morning, you see, and I've been trying to work—I work in my room. I'm a writer. And it is bad! It's awful! But you mustn't tell him to have it disconnected. That would be— Oh, only think how I should feel!"

"Forgive me," said Peter Holloway hastily, with quite unlooked for awkwardness dropping a couple of letters. As a matter of fact, he was overcome by a fear that she might be going to cry. "Please don't feel badly! I don't like that telephone. Never did. If it annoys you as much when I'm out as it does me when I'm in, why, there's nothing else for it—it's gotta go." He stooped to pick up the letters.

"But couldn't you just leave word at the office when you are to be out? I—I didn't really mean it, about cutting the wires. I was frightfully angry, you see. I was furious. And I'm afraid I actually wished to inconvenience you in some way. But if you could just leave word at the office—"

"I could do anything, almost," said

the young man, "except leave word at an office. That, I am sure, I could never do." He looked out of the window thoughtfully.

"What a curious person!" said Cynthia to herself. She turned to the clerk and spoke in a low voice. "Can you put me in some other room?" she asked.

"I don't know, miss," said the clerk sturdily, in quite his usual tone. "We're pretty full just now. But I'll see what I can do for you. We might be able to get you a room on the court, if you didn't mind that."

"Really, I can't permit this," said Peter Holloway suddenly, coming over to the desk and taking matters entirely into his own hands. "What is your name?" he asked of the clerk. "I hate to talk to people I don't know."

"Abel, sir," said the boy. "Abel Young."

"Well, for Heaven's sake!" ejaculated Cynthia under her breath.

"How do you do, Abel?" said the extraordinary young man. "My name is Holloway."

"Sure it is, Mr. Holloway," said the boy, grinning. "How are you, sir?" He shook hands awkwardly.

Cynthia did not wait for the next move.

"I am Cynthia Bainbridge," she said, and held out her hand, with a whole lot of friendliness.

"Miss Bainbridge," said Peter Holloway immediately, and very gently, "you mustn't think of leaving the room you are in, and the lighthouses, and all the pretty ships. As for that telephone of mine, that is a matter between Abel and myself. Abel, there's an ugly and very noisy instrument in my room which annoys me constantly, even when I am far away. You must see to it that it is quietly disposed of. Keep it yourself if you like, Abel, or give it back to Mr. Bell."

"Yessir," said the boy.

Cynthia turned toward the stairway.

"Thank you, Mr. Holloway," she said. "I hope you'll forgive me for my unpleasantness," and she went back to her room.

She was just fitting the key into the lock when she heard swift steps behind her, as of some one running up the stairs four or five steps at a time and racing through the corridor at full speed. In a moment, Peter Holloway swung himself around the corner by one hand and came up to her.

"Do you dislike getting fog in your hair?" he asked abruptly.

Cynthia looked at him in bewilderment.

"Why, n-no," she replied after a moment falteringly. "It—it makes it curl."

"What I mean is," said Peter, "you must be awfully tired and all upset, and all that sort of thing, and you really oughtn't to work any more this morning. As for me, I can't work, because it's too sloppy out. But I can't stay in. I never can. And I thought it would be nice, if you'd like to come, to go walking in the wet."

In ten minutes, they were well on their way to the shore.

"But you get out of it," Cynthia was saying. They had walked out to Spruce Point and were seated uncomfortably upon an overturned ancient rowboat. "You go off up the shore some place and are gone all day. You get away from them. It's different with me. I can't write out of doors. I never could. It's either too beautiful or too buggy. And all the time they call me up—and want me to go places with them and do things with them—and they bore me so! I came up here to work. I didn't know a soul. And I thought I could be by myself. But the way one gets acquainted with people in these places is incredible."

"Well, of course," said Peter Holloway, "if you *will* cut the wires of strange gentlemen's telephones—"

"Oh, please!" said Cynthia.

They were silent a moment.

Peter Holloway carefully selected a flat stone and threw it at the surface of the water. It sank, just like a round stone. He tried another. Then he dusted his hands gloomily and sat down on a damp rock.

"They follow me," he said, looking at the gray harbor, "well, you know. They take long walks in the woods, or go in bathing, or some darned thing, but always around in sight. Want their portraits painted unawares. I know. They follow me, all right. And their drawling, well-bred, ill-mannered children follow me, and get their silly dogs mixed up in the legs of my easel. Then when I come back to the hotel at night, they're all roosting about on the porch to ask me how I've been getting on, and if they may see it as far as I've got, and why don't I paint the Episcopal rectory by sunset, or the Methodist—er—er—parsonage at moonrise"—he picked up a little rock and began to scratch white marks on the ledge—"or their children, sleeping," he concluded.

Cynthia was looking at his hands, and forgot to say anything.

After a moment, he took up the subject again, plaintively, like a grieved child.

"And then they tease me to come and eat at their table, and I don't want to eat at their table—want to eat at my own table—so I say I've got a headache, and have my dinner in my room again—which I hate. It's an awful room! There's a door that—"

"Yes, I know," said Cynthia. "It's just the same on the other side."

"Oh, of course!" said Peter. "By Jove, that's right, too! You do get the other side of that door. How does it look on your side? Is there a board across?"

"No. It's fastened with a hasp, and then the knob is tied to a nail with rope."

"I see. Horrid idea! Well, on my side it's bolted, and then there's a board across. Wonder why they didn't just lock the thing and lose the key, instead of going to all that trouble."

"Probably," Cynthia suggested, "the key had already been lost." She arose and walked down to the edge of the water.

"Oh, yes, of course that was it," said Peter, following her. "I say, Miss Bainbridge, you must be cold. Don't you want my coat?"

"No, of course I don't want your coat. Why should I? I knew it was going to be wet out and I wore some clothes of my own."

"Oh," said Peter, "I beg your pardon."

Cynthia turned to him quickly and put out an impulsive hand, which he grasped at once, with a curious sense of gratitude.

"I'm sorry!" she said. "I'm becoming dreadfully rude. It's really very bad, you know. I'm losing all my feminine softness."

Peter Holloway looked down at her hand for a brief moment and then released it.

"Not quite," he said.

"But you're right—there is danger," he went on, "for women nowadays. I admire them, you know, and all that, but I don't like 'em any more. They—they've got sort of bony, mostly. I suppose you vote?"

"Not yet," said Cynthia. "But soon I shall!"

Peter smiled.

"What ticket?" he asked, with some indulgence, "if you don't mind."

"Of course I don't mind—Socialist," Cynthia replied promptly.

"Good Lord! Well, I'm darned!"

Peter Holloway laughed aloud and at some length.

"How in Heaven's name," he asked finally, "did you ever happen to think you'd be a Socialist?"

Cynthia shrugged and adjusted a hairpin. His attitude both amused and annoyed her.

"As to that," she said coolly, "I'm fond of the way I make a capital S."

"Ah," said Peter Holloway offensively, "but all you have to do is make a cross, you know."

Cynthia thrust her hands into the pockets of her little leather coat.

"Indeed?" she said, with politeness. "Well, in that case, I dare say it won't matter to me much which way I cast my ballot."

Peter turned from the examination of a cast-up oar blade to look at her.

"My dear Miss Bainbridge," he exclaimed, when he had caught sight of her face, "I was only joking! Can it be that you are really annoyed?"

"Of course I am annoyed! It doesn't matter whether you were joking or not—and, besides, you were not joking. Why am I a Socialist! Of all the—Why are you an impressionist—or a vorticist—or whatever it is you are? Because you like to squeeze paint from a tube? You might as well take tooth-paste, if that's all it means to you! But the real reason is because you believe in the thing, isn't it? Because you see a future for it and want to help it through! If it's the fact, as you say, that women get bonier all the time, it's equally true, Mr. Holloway, that men get fatter and fatter!"

At this moment, although she neglected to mention it to me in her account of the episode, I dare give you my oath that Cynthia was even disconcertingly beautiful—her gray eyes bright with anger and earnest as a child's, and her soft hair, which would by now be blown into fine curls all about her head, strung wonderfully with little beads of mist. And she neglected also to acquaint me with the ensuing response of Peter Holloway, the reason being, of course, that he said nothing at all, but merely looked at her,

any remark of actual relevance that may at the time have occurred to him seeming, beyond a doubt and paradoxically enough, utterly beside the point.

At five o'clock, they came back to the hotel in the pouring rain, with their arms full of bayberry.

This was Tuesday.

Wednesday morning, at about nine-thirty, Cynthia was awakened, as usual, by the ringing of the telephone. She opened her eyes and blinked several times. Then she coughed and said aloud to herself graciously, "Hello! Oh, good morning, Miss Flint!" just to see whether or not she had any voice to speak with. It was very embarrassing sometimes to speak into the telephone immediately upon awakening. One's voice was so often too ludicrously earnest, or too hasty and terrified, or too husky and unintelligible.

"Hello!" said Cynthia into the transmitter, graciously and noncommittally. But she was still very sleepy, and after she had said, "Hello!" quite unexpectedly she giggled aloud.

"Good morning," said the voice of Peter Holloway. "Are you laughing at me?"

"Oh—good morning, Mr. Holloway! No—of course I wasn't laughing at you. How could I be? I—I didn't know it *was* you." She was still very sleepy. "I was laughing to think how funny it is to say, 'Hello!' It's so rude, you know, actually, or presumptuous even. Of course it depends on who's at the other end of the wire, but since one never knows who's at the other end till after one's said, 'Hello!'—why, it's bound to be *very* intimate and familiar!"

Cynthia broke off abruptly and caught her breath. Then she laughed a little deprecatingly.

"How are you this morning?" asked Peter Holloway, who did not know what to say.

"I don't know," Cynthia returned, quite simply. "I just woke up."

"You mean to say you've not even had your coffee yet?" cried Peter. "Now I, for my part, am always quite inarticulate until I have taken my coffee—and shockingly bad-mannered. I make signs, you know, and leer, and push things away from me."

"From where are you telephoning?" asked Cynthia.

Her process of thought had been as follows: "Dear me, I must never call *him* up in the morning! Oh, but I couldn't if I should want to. His phone's been disconnected. Wonder where he's calling from, anyway."

"I don't know," said Peter. "I haven't looked to see," and they both laughed.

"I'm in a sort of store, down in the village. Don't know the name of it. On the corner of Main Street and—er—Mechanic Street—you know. They sell—er— Let me see. They sell raspberries and tinned shrimps and melons and eggs and egg-beaters and shredded wheat and fly-killers and kerosene and cheese and lamp chimneys and—"

"Stop! Stop!" cried Cynthia.

"And all those things for which 'There is a Reason,'" Peter continued.

"Nash & Hastings," said Cynthia.

"Yes, I believe that is the name. Miss Bainbridge, I called you up for two reasons. First, because I wanted to prove to myself that I am not a coward. After all those things you told me, you know, about people ringing you up and wanting you to come and do something with them, I half expected you to bite off a bit of the transmitter and crunch it in my ear. Secondly, because I want you to come and do something with me."

"What?" asked Cynthia. "I really have to work and all that, you know, so I'm sure I can't do it—but I'm curious to know what it is."

"You can't work till you've had your breakfast, can you?"

"Why, no. I never do."

"Well, then, that's it. It's all right. Because what I want you to do is to come and have breakfast with me on Barren Island."

"Oh! Oh, how lovely! Of course I'll come! Nothing would make me so happy! I can see the bay from here, and all the little boats— But I don't quite understand— I mean to say— how does one get out to Barren Island?"

"It's very easy," said Peter Holloway. "One of those little boats is mine."

"Oh! Oh!" cried Cynthia, like a very little girl. "Where do I meet you? Oh, and such a lovely day!"

It was the summer when people were wearing white tennis shoes trimmed with colored leather. Cynthia's were trimmed with green, and she wore a soft white sweater with a green belt and collar. Otherwise, she was all in white, so white that in the sun she was almost dazzling. It occurred to Peter that the things girls wear in the summer are really much lovelier than the things they wear in the winter.

It seemed to Cynthia quite beyond belief that it should be the dory with the orange sail. She had watched it so often from her window—the prettiest boat in the bay, she thought—and had wondered whose it was, and who was in it. So it had been he. She watched him as he raised the sail and made fast the sheet at the base of the mast.

"He's very handsome in a queer way," she thought, "especially in those clothes. And his hands are wonderful. I never saw such hands."

She remembered that one day she had seen the little orange sail almost level with the water, in a black squall, and had been concerned for the man at the tiller. So it had been he.

"Can you swim, Mr. Holloway?"

"Why, yes—yes, I can."

"Well?"

"Pretty well." He smiled.

"How well?"

"Why, I don't know. I can swim all right. I'm not *professional*."

Cynthia was satisfied.

"He swims beautifully," she thought.

"Everything about him is nice, so far."

Later, she watched him build a little stove of rocks and broil the bacon on a pointed stick, and she sighed involuntarily.

"Are you sleepy or bored or what?" he asked, looking up at her through the fragrant smoke of the driftwood.

"I was thinking," said Cynthia, "how sad it is that this is the sort of thing one really loves to do, and that one so seldom does it." Which, while it was not exactly what she had been thinking, was near enough.

"One could do it all one's life, I suppose, if one wished," said Peter Holloway.

Cynthia looked down at the top of his head. He was very busy putting little sticks under the coffee.

"I wonder," she said to herself. "I just wonder. He doesn't look it, but one never can tell about men. They are sometimes very crafty."

She sat for some time listening to the water washing about the ledges and the sound of the wind in the pines.

"It's so wonderfully quiet," she said finally, "so peaceful! Nobody chasing you about to get you to hold their yarn."

"Or their babies," said Peter. "Miss Bainbridge, what are we going to do about those people at the hotel? Things can't go on like this. We can't work. We can't even play, unless we get off on an island out of reach."

"Yes, it's dreadful. I don't like people, really. I hate them."

"I thought you were a Socialist."

Cynthia laughed.

"Yes, I thought so, too," she said. "No, but truly, Mr. Holloway, just because a thing is one's politics, must it necessarily be one's breakfast food?"

"Not as far as I am concerned, certainly, Miss Bainbridge," said Peter, laughing. "I am unreservedly of your opinion. I could find it in my heart to wish that in my extreme youth I had slaughtered my father and mother, in order that now our fellow guests might feel called upon to shun me."

"Or had a disease," suggested Cynthia.

"Exactly, or a scandalous reputation."

"That's it! That's it precisely!" cried Cynthia. "We're too respectable."

"By Jove!" said Peter Holloway. "I believe you have it!"

They stared at each other across their coffee cups.

"If only you had two husbands," he said.

"Or you," said Cynthia, "should play croquet every afternoon at five with the wife of the proprietor."

"God forbid!" cried he. "Have you seen her?"

"Yes, several times. But this is a desperate affair."

Peter Holloway cut two slices of bread very thin and toasted them carefully upon a red-hot rock.

"We might take down the door," said he.

"Two of 'em wink and four of 'em don't. Two of 'em wink and four of 'em don't."

It was midnight by the little clock on Cynthia's dresser, and she knew it. Her hands were tightly clasped together, and very cold.

"Two of 'em wink and four of 'em don't. Two of 'em wink and——"

"Oh, Miss Bainbridge, are you there?" called Peter Holloway softly, through the partition.

"Right here, Mr. Holloway," said Cynthia instantly, and picking up her nail scissors from the bureau, she came over to the door. "I—I don't mind saying I feel very adventurous," she confessed, with a little nervous laugh, "and awfully frightened. You—you begin first."

"All right."

There ensued the unmistakable sound, but as muffled as possible, of nails being drawn from wood by means of a hammer. It took some time to do this. Once Cynthia thought of stealing out of her room and going down to the library for a magazine or a match or something, and never coming back, but she could not move. And once she said, "Heavens!" fervently, and almost aloud. But when the third nail had been groaningly withdrawn, she began to saw frantically with the little curved scissors at the rope that held the doorknob, saying over and over to herself like a prayer all the while, "Four of 'em wink and two of 'em don't. Four of 'em wink and——"

"No, that's not right," she said suddenly in a loud voice. "It's only two of 'em."

"I beg your pardon?" said Peter.

"Nothing," she said. "All right," and lifted the hasp.

At the same time, she heard the bolt drawn back on the other side.

There was a tense silence; then a giggle; then, amid groans of laughter painfully smothered to the point of tears and muffled shrieks of mirth, Cynthia opened the door and held out her hand.

"Good evening!" she said, very formally, and they went off again into difficult peals of joy.

But conversation, across the dividing sill, was uncomfortable and desultory, and neither had the courage to say, "Come in." So in a few moments they said, "Good night," instead, and closed the door.

Neither of them got to sleep for quite some time.

At ten o'clock the next morning, Cynthia came to the door and called, "Oh, Mr. Holloway!"

There was no answer.

"He's out," said Cynthia, and opened the door, as he had directed her to do, but slowly and with considerable trepidation.

A stout young woman, dressed in gingham and wearing a sweeping cap, was on her knees, sweeping out under the bed. She looked up, startled, at the sound of the opening door, and stared at Cynthia, who, after a moment of awful sinking at the heart, came quietly into the room, took down from Peter Holloway's bookshelf an inscrutably technical work on pigment, and, bearing it solemnly to her own chamber, copied down three pages of it faithfully, word for word, upon her typewriter.

At five o'clock, she closed the door. At five-thirty, Peter came in. At six, they met in the dining room and took dinner together, intimately.

The thing was done. There was no doubt about that.

Never had the two rooms been so swept, so dusted, so divested of cobwebs, so supplied with towels and ice water, as they were for the next eight days.

It was a fearful strain, however, especially because it had early occurred to Cynthia that when the proprietor should hear of it, they would undoubtedly both be expelled, spectacularly and unpleasantly—although she said nothing of this to her fellow conspirator, to whom the same potentiality had presented itself, but who, on the occasions of their daily excursions abroad, remained equally silent.

Moreover, everybody who had ever come to call came to call now, to look at the door, and the desired ostracism of herself and Peter Holloway by the

other guests seemed ominously long in coming.

The thing that had happened was this:

Of the occupants of this particular hotel, some were young, many were middle-aged, two or three were old. And it came to pass that of the youthful constituent, all were bored; of the middle-aged, all were romantic; of the old, all tolerant—an unforeseen development and, in this instance, shattering.

They were watched, they were followed, they were fawned upon, they were bidden to feasts, their advice was asked on important matters, they were indulged, they were blessed, they were envied, they were even toasted. Ostracized they were not. A painter and a novelist—these were no common folk. One had always heard that such people did disreputable things, but one had never before had such a pair next door to one—and that during a dull vacation. If they had not been so celebrated, and therefore so mysterious and so desirable, things might have been different.

As it was, many people were scandalized, of course, and thought that such a thing should not be allowed to go on, but these were of the romantic division, and although they disapproved heartily, secretly they rejoiced. Moreover, the dog-day fog had set in dismally; there was nowhere to go and nothing to do. The affair of Peter and Cynthia was the only moving speck upon the hostelry horizon. At any rate, nobody felt called upon to take the matter to the proprietor; at least, the culprits received no notice to vacate their nefarious apartment.

But the thing was telling on them. Neither of them could work at all now, and the inquisitive eyes of their fellow guests became soon like something seen in a constantly recurring nightmare. Also, the door itself was getting un-

speakably on their nerves—a door without a lock that was never opened save when one of them was absent. But of this also they said not a word to each other.

On Wednesday afternoon, a week from the date of their innocent union, the two went out again to Barren Island and cooked their supper on the rocks. And after they had eaten, and while Peter was off up the beach in search of driftwood with which to replenish the fire, Cynthia went fast asleep on the sand, with her head on Peter's sweater. It was the first good sleep she had had in all this time.

It had been a terrible week for Peter, too. Night after night, he had lain awake looking at the door, until it would seem that it opened. And sometimes it would seem that she entered the room and went over to the window and stood looking at the light-houses, with her hand on the curtain. This was the week, too, of the full of the moon.

At times he was certain that he heard her moving about in her own apartment, but afterward he would set this down as just another phantom of his wakeful mind.

Now, as he walked up the shore slowly, stooping now and again to gather up a bit of fuel, his eyes closed and his head dropped forward on his breast. He laughed at himself and lighted a cigarette with hands that trembled from sleeplessness.

When he returned and found her lying there like a tired child, a sudden faintness came over him and he sat down quickly, with the wood still in his arms. After he was somewhat recovered he reached for his cup, which was still standing beside the fire, and, pouring from the pot the remainder of the coffee, drank it down, black and bitter. Then he laid some fresh wood on the fire and sat down at a little dis-

tance from Cynthia, to watch while she slept.

It seemed to him, looking at her, that he had never seen her before. He observed her carefully for a while, and quite impersonally. Then she moved in her sleep, and flung out one hand in the direction of the fire, a little too near the fire, Peter thought. He took the hand and placed it gently back upon her breast; after which he covered her with his coat—a thing that he had not thought to do before—and went over to where he had been sitting before. Her hand had been astonishingly warm and soft, he thought. He wished he had not put it back quite so soon.

In a few moments, he went over to her again, drew back the covering a little, and took the hand in his, cautiously. For a long time he sat there in this way, holding her hand and looking into her face. Finally he covered her with his coat as before and went back to his former place. He drew his knees up to his chin and crossed his arms upon them. After a little while, he dropped his forehead upon his arms.

It was quite dark when he awoke. The fire was burning brightly. Cynthia was sitting before it, feeding it with the last of the wood. His sweater was about her shoulders, but the coat she had placed over him, as he slept.

She felt his eyes upon her and turned to look at him.

"Oh, hello!" she said.

"Hello!" said Peter. "What time is it?"

"Quarter past eleven. Want some toast?"

"Quarter past *what*?"

"Eleven. Would you like some toast?"

"Why, it *can't* be!" He sat up and looked at her helplessly.

"Well, it is. And there's nothing we can do about it that I can see. Here, eat this, and I'll make you another.

You'll need it. There's not a breath of wind. You'll have to row back."

"But why, for Heaven's sake, should we go back? Things can't be worse at the hotel, no matter what we do. Why not stay right here until morning?"

"Because," said Cynthia, "we haven't any blankets."

The entire next day Cynthia remained in her room. She was worn out. After the first telephone call, she rang up the office and left word that she should not be disturbed for the remainder of the day. Then, for most of the day, she slept. She awoke unrested. She tried to work, but gave that up almost at once. She tried to read, but the sight of the book on pigment which she had not returned to Peter Holloway made her too nervous at the outset, and she gave that up. For the first time in a week, the door between the two rooms remained closed all day.

That evening she waited vainly for her dinner tray, at about eight o'clock becoming very hungry. But for some reason which she could not quite analyze, she was unwilling to call up about it, and at half-past ten, after sitting at the window for a while, looking out upon the people moving about on the lawn and along the road, laughing and chatting, she crept into bed, thoroughly miserable.

At eleven o'clock, Peter Holloway came upstairs and went to bed. Until midnight he lay and smoked furiously, with all the lights on. After that he lay in the dark and looked at the moonlight on the door. At one o'clock he got out of bed, put on his dressing gown, smoothed back his hair with his hand, went over, and stood before the door for some moments; then he went back to bed and turned on the light, so that he might not see the moonbeams on the door. But he could not get to

sleep with the light on. At a quarter to two, he turned out the light once more and drew the covers up over his eyes.

"I wish I knew—I wish I knew," he kept saying to himself, "I wish I knew what is the matter, or if she is asleep, or can't get to sleep, or is sick, or something. Probably she just didn't want to see me. Probably she's been asleep since ten o'clock."

But at two o'clock, he heard her turn on her light and rise and move about the room.

"She can't get to sleep, either!" he groaned into his pillow. "Oh, my God!"

She turned off her light in a few moments, but he did not think that she returned to bed; he thought she might be sitting before the window.

Suddenly he sat up, threw back the covers, and listened intently.

"She's crying!" he said to himself fiercely. "That's just what she's doing!"

He got out of bed and went over to the door, thrusting his arms into the sleeves of his gown.

"Cynthia! Cynthia!" he called.

She raised her head from the window ledge. After a moment, she answered.

"Yes," she said. "What do you want? What is it?"

"I don't know what I want. I want to see you. I want you to stop your crying!"

She did not reply, and he stood before the door, breathing deep breaths, which she could hear from the other side.

"Cynthia," he said at last, "Cynthia dear—I can't stand this! I've got to see you! Won't you open the door?"

"Yes," she said, after a little pause, "yes, Peter, of course I will," and she arose and went to the door and opened it.

They stood for a moment looking at each other.

Then Peter spoke.

"Cynthia," he said, "I love you more than anything I can think of. Did you know that?"

"No, I didn't know it. But I hoped that you did. I love *you*," she said, "terribly—oh, terribly! You are all I think about!"

"Cynthia—oh, my *dear*!" he cried, in a great voice full of wonder.

And then, incredibly, she was in his arms, and his beautiful hand was smoothing back her hair.

In a little while, he brought some blankets from his bed, and wrapped in these, they sat before her window until after sunrise, saying very little, drowsing a bit sometimes, for they were both very tired.

It was three days before they left the hotel and went away together. Heaven knows where—to one of those God-forsaken islands, I suppose, where you get sand in your stockings and salt in your hair and rheumatism in the calves of your legs, and go in swimming four times as often as you want to, just because you don't have to wear your Annette. And whether or not, before their departure, they had the good taste to drop in upon some languid

justice of the peace and secure unto their radiant union his perfectly unimportant blessing, I cannot tell you. Cynthia wears no thin circlet of gold or platinum on the third finger of her left hand—but then she wouldn't anyway. She does not go by the name of Mrs. Peter Halloway—but then she wouldn't anyway. These advanced thinkers are the devil and all to keep track of. Besides, as for myself, I never even wanted to know.

There is one matter, however, concerning which I have always felt a restless curiosity. During those three days, before their scandalous and notorious flight, but after the establishment of their mutual understanding—what about the door? Was it kept piously closed—or honestly open—or sweetly and improperly ajar? I dare say I shall never know. On one occasion, when I found courage to ask of Cynthia a faltering question bearing on this point, she did not hear me at all. At any rate, all that she replied was this: "Dear, *could* you scratch up a cigarette for a starving woman? I find to my horror that my case is entirely void."

Oh, well, after all, I suppose it really *isn't* any of my business.



O LOVE, DO NOT FORGET

O LOVE, do not forget the night we kissed,
Awakening some elemental thing
That slowly stirred, like an enormous wing
Of fate; or how we heard the heavens sing,
Enwrapped in scented spray and wind-blown mist.

The sweet self-torture of those hours
Has lovelier memory with me
Than summer winds athwart our Arcady,
Than all our dear adventures by the sea—
Ah, sweeter than fresh, honey-weighted flowers!

NINA WILCOX PUTNAM.

Morning in the Pines

By George Sterling

HUSHED is the hour, the shadows long.
As mingling shadows westward slant,
Your lyric gaze is like a song
Far in my heart, significant.

Draw closer, now, and share with me
The soundless peace of early day.
Ah, loneliness and mystery
Of mountains watched from far away!

Among the pines the grass is bright
With scarlet gleam or flash of blue—
Mutations of arrested light
In reddening leaf and fane of dew;

And russet needles idly fall—
Touched by a soft and voiceless breeze—
On flowers whose fragrance can recall
Only unhappy memories.

This joy is pain. Look upward, girl!
Say where that ocean cloud is bound—
A vast and shadow-haunted pearl,
Remote in morning's pure profound.

All, all is passing—cloud and flower;
The very hills at last shall fade.
In all the years we find this hour,
In all the worlds this quiet glade.

What need to know the hidden clew
To meaning, if a meaning be?
I find the mystery led to you;
Oh, may you find its touch in me!

This alien glory of the earth
Is like a shadow on the sense;
You, you alone, can make of worth
Beauty's divine indifference.



The Corridor Train

By R. Ramsay

THE five-thirty was never a crowded train. It stood at the platform waiting, under the dim glass vault through which the sun never penetrated to lighten the gloom of the vast terminus, and its regular passengers dribbled through the barrier. Most of them were business men, people of importance in their own mighty world, men who passed along without haste and settled down in their favorite seats—assigned to them by the right of custom, like pews in church—and lit dignified cigars. The five-thirty was a very respectable train, and its passengers were so likewise. It left too early to be swamped by the suburban rush of women and City clerks.

One large man with a ponderous tread and a pale, heavy face stalked through the gate, acknowledging the official's deferential salute with an abstracted nod. There was about him the atmosphere of one who daily dealt in large issues and for whom all trains wait and the clock itself stands still. Those who knew him by sight supposed him a director of some tremendous concern. His very step spoke of power and responsibility.

He went slowly down the train, scarcely glancing at the long row of corridor carriages, till he came to the one he usually occupied, an empty first-class compartment, halfway down. Mechanically he got in and, instead of the customary cigar, took an ancient rubbed-leather volume out of his pocket and studied it intently. It was a very

old book upon occult subjects, and the man himself was Delphos, the celebrated palmist.

The light was bad. Impossible to see clearly till the train moved out of this gloom! He looked up peevishly from under his heavy brows, and became conscious of a girl sitting in the opposite corner.

She was slight and young, white like a snowdrop, wearing a large black hat that shadowed her colorless little face. To his first surprise at her presence, succeeded a curious interest. He could scarcely say what it was about her that struck him—perhaps her extraordinary lack of restlessness, perhaps her utter unconsciousness of his notice. She never lifted her eyes.

Some one closed the carriage door with a bang, and the train slid out into the brazen daylight. It would be unpardonable in him to keep on staring. He turned back to his book.

A little way out of London, the sun was blotted out by a tunnel—a minute of roaring darkness as the train whizzed through. He waited patiently, with his finger on the page, turning over in his mind the last phrase he had been reading. It was pregnant with hidden meaning, but a little hard to grasp, a little obscure, even to him, a professed master of the occult. And as the light came back with a blinding suddenness, he blinked, and saw that the seat opposite him was empty.

He had not heard his fellow passenger moving out into the corridor. He

felt a very odd disappointment, a vague sense of opportunity missed, a distinct and puzzling feeling of loss.

Some time later, he saw her again. Her little pale face shone at a carriage window as he stalked heavily down the platform, and he checked himself abruptly and got into the same compartment, he could not have told himself exactly why.

Covertly he watched her, with the piercing eyes that were so acute in measuring all kinds of foolish fellow creatures. He was slightly amused at his own interest.

And then the strange, the illuminating thing occurred. The doors were shutting, the train was already in motion, when a party of excited travelers surged into the carriage, pushing each other, hot and triumphant from their tussle with the guard. The last man, pitching forward, was flung on to the padded velvet seat—in her corner.

Delphos made a hasty movement to grasp at him. He expected the man to jump up with an apology. Nothing of the kind. Instead, he settled himself more comfortably and wiped his brow, quite unconscious that a girl had been sitting there.

"We ran that a bit too fine!" he remarked agreeably to his vis-à-vis—and wondered why the fellow was staring at him with that look of amazement.

For Delphos, the famous seer and occultist, he whose name was whispered with awe in high and mystic circles, who had dipped deep into strange wells of knowledge, and from whose piercing gaze few mysteries were hid, had seen a plain ghost and had not known it.

He felt rather a fool and very much inclined to put down the whole thing to a trick of the imagination. Undoubtedly, spiritualistic phenomena and appearances were a part of his creed. He had lectured and written a great deal most impressively on these mat-

ters. His book on spirit rapping and his treatise on astral communication were all the fashion, and—so does a man's mental outlook become inevitably tinged by the atmosphere he works in—it was not all humbug. In a darkened chamber, with a magnetic ring of devotees, perhaps—things might happen. But not in a noisy London railway station in common daylight. The notion mocked belief. It was too crude and shocking.

"I'll go up by an earlier train tomorrow and see Blake," he muttered. "My liver must be out of order."

His own business hours were from eleven to five. He journeyed up from his country house in the morning, like a City man, to his office. Delphos was too great a being to advertise. People spoke of him to each other in fashionable circles; his name was one to conjure with, his address eagerly asked for. And he saw his clients at his mysterious London house, shut off by a high stone wall from the ignorant passer-by.

Some one, either idly or guessing at strange traffic within, had chalked "Eternity" in startling white letters on the blackness of the wall. A woman, hurrying round the corner and glancing at the scribbled warning, laughed hysterically and swallowed in her throat. She reached the entry, pressed the button, and watched the invisible opening of the little door in the wall; then, with an air of violent determination, she cast herself in.

Behind her the big man himself came slowly, with his unhurried tread. His call on his doctor had made him late.

The door opened to him with its magic swiftness, and he walked up the flagged path that divided the queer little garden, mounted the steps, guarded from above by sphinxes, and stepped into the hall, a vast, fantastic vista of black pillars and Egyptian decoration, calculated to heighten the eerie effect

of the place. Several people were already waiting, sitting about on the scattered divans. A young man fidgeted restlessly in a dim nook, breathing hard, ready to shy like a frightened horse; a little knot of well-dressed women bent their faces close together, shrilly whispering; another, quite alone, was nervously stripping off her rings.

He passed through indifferently, glancing neither to right nor left, and gained his study, a large, comfortable room, staid as a doctor's consulting room. Impressionable clients, wrought up to a pitch of high nervous tension by the subtle and disturbing atmosphere of the antechamber, with its suggestion of Eastern magic, drew a long breath of relief when they found no magician, but a delightful mixture of father confessor and confidential physician. There was nothing tawdry, nothing terrifying in the big man who addressed them with the grave authority of a fashionable doctor. And his sedate manner made the scoffed-at science of palmistry seem as honorable as any other science, as infallible as the science of microbes. One felt his power, implicitly one believed him.

One after another, his clients were introduced by his secretary and disposed of. They were all ordinary subjects, simple to handle, easy to diagnose. It was not necessary to concentrate his attention; the stereotyped methods were enough. And so he allowed himself to speculate, now and then, on that astounding experience that, so Blake had assured him, had nothing to do with his liver. Curious—more than curious!

The last one was ushered in—a woman of a certain prettiness, not quite young. She was carefully massaged and powdered, like most of her type, but the feverish color on her cheek bones was not cleverly applied rouge; it came and went. She took a funny little excited breath as she laid her ring-

less hands palm uppermost on the cushion, and looked across at him with eager eyes.

"I don't want to hear the past! Don't waste time in telling the past!" she cried.

"Hysterical," thought Delphos, with mild annoyance.

He took her wrists firmly for a moment, while he pretended—only pretended, for she was an ordinary type and not worth serious contemplation; one could read such women at half a glance—to study her open palms.

"What do you want to know?" he asked, in his professional, soothing voice.

"Minnie West told me you were just like a very nice doctor," she said irrelevantly, "so I came——"

"Yes," he said. "Just so. And what do you want to know?"

She had made a quick motion to withdraw her hands, as if she repented coming, but now she took another quick breath and flattened them on the cushion.

"Only the future," she said in a rush, and her voice was beseeching. "I want to know if the man I love will ever care for me."

It was the common cry. He looked down without much interest. It would be easy to spell out the secrets of those unguarded palms. He paused a moment, and then his eyes narrowed.

"The man you love," he said, "is your husband."

Her hands trembled slightly on the cushion. She laughed frivolously, but with a kind of breathlessness.

"Well?" she said. "Why do you sound so shocked? Is that so improper? I—I—— How do you know? Is it written in my hand?"

"Of course," said Delphos. "It is all written."

She was gazing up at his impassive countenance, a countenance that could,

if it were wise, keep his discoveries as closely as the Sphinx.

"Then go on—go on!" she said. "Will he ever love me?"

Little flat hands, with a passionate thumb and no intellect to speak of—they were just the type he had expected. But what he saw in them changed his manner subtly. He answered without looking up from a scrutiny that was not the cursory matter he had supposed it would be.

"I cannot say," he pronounced deliberately. "I cannot see beyond a tragedy that lies before you."

She interrupted him in a breath:

"Behind me, you mean! I told you not to tell me the past—not the past!"

"Pardon me," said Delphos. "I am looking into your future. The tragedy in your past was murder."

For a moment she sat staring at him, struck silent. Then she began to laugh hysterically, like a person who has got to the limit of self-control. The desperate curiosity that had driven her to him was satisfied, and the terror in her eyes was mixed recklessly with relief.

"Then you *know*! It was driving me mad!" she said. "I may as well tell you all about it."

He listened, impassible. It had been his lot to surprise many secrets.

She faced him with a queer bravado, half cunning and half piteous.

"You can't give me away," she said. "I'm not such a fool—I know that. With any one else, it'd be too dangerous, but with *you*—"

She checked herself. Visibly she was thinking that, in case of betrayal, one had only to cry blackmail, and who would credit the charlatan, the palmist? She was safe in indulging herself in the luxury of confession.

"Exactly," he said, glancing at her with a touch of humor as he followed the elementary workings of her mind.

She plunged eagerly into a torrent of explanation.

"I didn't mean to do it," she said. "I never planned and plotted— But Dick and I had been engaged for years and years. It wasn't my fault that we weren't married before he went abroad. He said he must make his way, and then he would come back for me. And I agreed, and waited. Waited and waited! And every one sneered and pitied me, sticking to him. And then he came back at last, and I was so frightfully happy! I showed him off to all my friends and relations. And every day we went out to look at houses—"

Her voice, from a hurried whisper, grew shrill and ragged.

"All at once," she said, "he began to grow cold to me. He kept making excuses to put off our wedding. Oh, I wasn't blind! I saw he wanted to get out of the engagement, but I couldn't let him go now, I couldn't! People talked; they told me he had fallen madly in love with some silly little girl. They pointed her out to me in the street. And I just laughed at them. But I was boiling—*boiling*!"

She stopped and swallowed once or twice in her throat.

"Well," she said, "one afternoon I was coming down from town by the five-thirty train. It's a corridor train—and it was rather empty. And I saw that girl sitting in a corner seat, close to the door. I got in and sat down opposite. I only wanted to look at her."

"Yes," said Delphos, gravely.

"It was just curiosity," she repeated. "Bitter, bitter curiosity! I wanted to see her close, this thing that had come between me and the man who was all my life. I'd never spoken to her, you see; we didn't know each other. I sat down in the corner opposite, the corner nearest the handle of the door, and stared at her boldly, like any other

stranger. And I was glad that I had on my latest frock, and my hat with the high blue feathers. And I'd had my hair waved in town, and I took off my gloves, because I'd had my hands manicured—and, besides, I had got his ring on."

She poured out these trivialities all in a hurry, and then her voice hushed a little.

"She didn't take any notice of me," she said. "She sat with her eyes half shut, thinking—thinking of him, of my man she had stolen—smiling secretly to herself. It was that smile that made me go mad. I watched her get up and turn to reach something out of the rack just as we went roaring into the tunnel. And in that blackness I slid back the inside catch of the door—it was near my hand—and jumped from my seat and pushed her——"

Silence dropped upon her.

Then she seemed to recover herself. Already she was looking to see what effect her revelation had produced on Delphos, and a glimpse of morbid vanity betrayed itself in her stare. Perhaps her little soul could not grasp the full, unmitigated horror of what she had done; her mind was too small a prison to contain it without giving way. She resumed, with a gabbling speed, as if to wipe out fear.

"It was awfully simple, wasn't it?" she babbled. "The whole thing was over in a minute. I never even asked, 'Dare I? Shall I?' And there was the door swinging, and the draft! And I was so perfectly safe, you see. We weren't even acquaintances, and I'd got in at the last moment. And I walked along the corridor and sat down in another empty carriage. My knees trembled, but that was all. There was no fuss whatever when we ran into the station. And of course they brought it in an accident—it *was* an accident, really—when she was found in the tunnel."

"And he married you?" asked Delphos quietly, without comment.

"Yes," she said, in a suddenly flat voice. "There was no more reason for him to break his word to me. But I can't make him love me. And look what I've done for his sake! It's not fair I should be so wretched! Please read the future! It *must* be in my hand if the past is! Promise me he will change to me soon! I tell you he's just my life—I adore him! And it's killing me to watch him day after day, so tired of me, so doggedly polite to me——"

She ended on a note of hysteria that warned him, experienced as he was in dealing with such subjects. His large, confidential presence, so unmoved by the most startling disclosures, was a good asset. Cleverly, diplomatically, he got rid of her.

Then, with an odd, disconcerted consciousness, obliged to rule out his liver, he stood a moment heavily in the middle of the room, putting two and two together.

The five-thirty was his own train down; it was the train on which that woman had done her murdering—if, indeed, it were not all hysteria, this wild tale that corroborated the dreadful lines in her palm—and on that very train he had seen something that was not visible to others.

His own physis, pseudoscientific jargon struck him as tawdry nonsense compared to these sober facts. With a grunt, he shook himself and lumbered back to his desk, as his secretary introduced the next client, a lovelorn idiot from the suburbs.

Nothing occurred for a week or two. Day by day Delphos followed his customary routine. Day by day he journeyed up to town and came down to his country house in the evening. Nobody who saw him proceed slowly along the train before choosing his seat would

have guessed remotely what he was searching for.

Then, one afternoon when he was late himself and expected to miss his train, he found that it, also, had been delayed and was still drawn up at the usual platform. It was a rare circumstance for the respectable five-thirty to be behind time, but excursion trains had been running all day and these had unsettled the regular traffic.

He had hardly settled himself in his empty first-class carriage when a party of well-dressed people, laughing and talking like pleasure seekers, followed. Their chattering voices filled the compartment with an influx of inconsequent gayety as they sat down, never glancing at the sedate presence in the corner farthest from the door, and talking hard. Apparently they were keeping the wedding anniversary of two of their number; they had been to a matinee, and were all going down to a large dinner party in honor of the occasion.

"I can't see the others," gurgled one man who was leaning out, looking back along the platform. "They'll miss it, by jingo! I wonder what's the next train down. I say—guard!"

He exchanged a few words with the official and turned his head, with a shout of laughter.

"What train do you suppose we are in, you people? It's the good old five-thirty—not the six o'clock! The dignified train of the demigods and the City magnates! I've never known her late before. Must have hung back on purpose to honor this celebration, hey? Won't you take this corner seat, Mrs. Carter? What? You'd rather sit next your husband? Naturally!"

He subsided, with a good-natured grin that took in the whole party, but was principally directed at these two—the quiet man in the seat near the platform and the woman next him, whose rather fatiguing high spirits had suddenly collapsed.

Perhaps not one of the noisy party had caught her exclamation when she had heard what train this really was. If they did, they attached no significance to her slight, sharp cry. Only Delphos, unaccountably moved to glance across from the depths of the farther corner, saw a look of horror on her face.

She it was, the unhappy wretch who had consulted him.

A swift sense of the fatal irony of this unpremeditated bit of reality quickened him. Unrecognized, an ignored presence, he watched the situation to which he held a tragic key, as the train slid along under the dim vault and emerged, gathering momentum.

The man who had jovially blocked the doorway flung a sheaf of picture papers into the rack behind him and, saying that he would move along to a smoker and finish his cigar, squeezed his way toward the corridor, leaving his seat—the outside corner, back to the engine—vacant. Strangely enough, it remained empty; the others were too absorbed in intimate gossip, bandying incidents of that bygone wedding, to encroach. They went on prattling loudly. And facing the empty seat, the man they called Carter, the former bridegroom, sat with his elbow leaning on the window sill and his eyes fixed in a kind of dream. He *saw* nothing—of that Delphos was assured. His was the far-away, abstracted gaze of a man who was accustomed, in the dull company of one he neither loved nor hated, to withdraw into some inner life.

He was a tall man with a strong chin and well-cut features. He looked like a man, alert and passionate by nature, who had been stunned by a blow.

The trivial chatter hardly reached him as he leaned his head on his hand, thinking deeply. He was far in spirit from the frivolous party and the

woman at his side, in her artificial triumph, keeping their wedding day. But he *saw* nothing yet. He was gazing blindly straight in front of him, with a smile that was half sad, half tender, like a man recalling a dear face.

The witness, who saw her plainly, drew his breath sharply and waited for whatever climax was impending. His whole power of foreseeing events, weak flicker that it was, had failed him. He was stupid.

The large black hat framed her little pale face that was like a snowdrop. She leaned back in the tired attitude he remembered, with downcast eyes, as if she, too, were dreaming. The foolish talk that buzzed so loud made no difference to her, so remote she was—and yet the gayly dressed person next her brushed against her sleeve. And her little thin shoes were dusty; he had not remembered that. Why, she was real—she *must* be real!

He looked covertly at each of his fellow passengers. Was she indeed visible to none of them? Not to that jolly, loud-voiced woman with the prominent eyes? Not to that little man perched on the arm of her seat, bubbling over with reminiscence and glancing round everywhere for applause? Not to that fashionable girl, the bridesmaid, with her peacock shrieks of laughter? Not even to that other woman, the wife, with her eager eyes and her hectic cheek bones, who had torn off her gloves and was twisting her restless hands, glittering with diamonds, in her lap? Not to the man who had loved her?

It was then that he saw the girl lift her eyes.

He blinked, stricken by the unbearable sweetness of that warm, adoring look; and in that flash, he, the spectator, realized that the eyes of these lovers had met at last. With a roar and a rush, the train thundered into the tunnel.

What followed was all one horrible confusion—a rush of cold wind, ear-splitting screams, and a struggle.

When the blinding daylight came back, the others were holding on to a frantic woman, trying to keep her from throwing herself out after her husband. There was no sign of him—only the swinging door.

There was no need to quarrel with the explanation given so plausibly at the inquest—it was simply a fatal accident. His friends gave evidence that poor Carter had jumped up suddenly as the train ran into the tunnel, probably to shut the window, and he must have leaned his weight on the door. The jury examined the train, and decided that there was a defective catch. They expressed great sympathy with his unfortunate widow, who had gone out of her mind with horror and, in her madness, babbled ignorantly of murder.

Only Delphos—who consulted his dignity by keeping out of the witness box, the law having a contemptuous tone with palmists and professors of the occult—understood how the two whom she had parted had found each other.



DALLIANCE

I HAVE dallied by the way
Many and many a happy day,
Counting pleasure, not by hours,
But by births and deaths of flowers.

HARRY KEMP.



While Waiting for Some One

By Lisle and Bertha Bell

IT was that brief, fleeting interval just before the dinner hour, when the functions of the softly lighted dining room appeared for the moment curiously suspended. The tables shone in ordered precision, like cool, spotless disks. The waiters were at their stations, attentive even to vacancy, doing nothing with that admirable air which is the crown of their calling.

Only a few isolated tables were occupied, and these did not dispel the calm. It was as if the room had become strangely aware of its own personality—of its linens and silver and its glossy, black-coated waiters—and sought to snatch a momentary communion with itself ere the chatter of crowded tables broke the spell. It was like the hush in the forest before a storm, or like the quick, appraising glance a pretty girl bestows upon her own reflection.

A woman in evening dress crossed the room and left a little eddy of agitation among the waiters in her path. She finally chose a table next the wall—a table for two with a shaded candle on it. She took her place and allowed the fur collar of her cloak to fall back over the chair, while the waiter arranged its velvet folds with an impersonal attentiveness which probably left him with no thoughts to squander on the youthful beauty of the wearer.

He placed a menu card before her and filled her water goblet.

"I am not ordering just yet," the woman murmured. "And will you tilt that chair against the edge of the table—so?"

The waiter tipped the vacant chair as he was directed, removed the menu card, hovered for an instant in the background, then resumed his post. He might have been wondering who the other person at the table for two was destined to be, but one could never have fathomed from his features whether that was his thought or not. Perhaps he was not thinking at all. Some waiters are like that.

In the course of a few minutes, a man, also in evening dress, came down the aisle between the tables, looking from one to another, for the influx of diners had begun and quite a number of the white disks were occupied.

The woman's chair was placed so that she could not see him, but as soon as he caught sight of the graceful neck and shoulders, and glanced beyond to the uptilted chair, he seemed to have reached the end of his search. He restored the vacant chair to a firmer footing and was about to draw it back with the easy assurance of an expected comer when his eyes met those of the girl.

The hand on the chair back relaxed its hold.

"I beg your pardon," he said, with a slight bow and a trace of embarrassment. "I—I seem to have the wrong table."

"That's quite all right, I'm sure," she replied.

There was neither surprise nor annoyance in her tone—merely amusement. Her eyes met his steadily. His hand still rested on the back of the chair.

"I'm really sorry. You see, I had an appointment to meet a friend here, and I thought——"

"You thought I looked like—a friend?"

They were both smiling.

"Not that, exactly. But from the back, you know——"

"I know. It's quite possible," she returned. "Perhaps she and I have our hair done at the same shop. So don't apologize."

"But I feel that I should——"

"That is a sufficiently good reason for not," she interrupted.

With his hand still resting on the back of the chair, it was easy to misinterpret the slightest gesture. Nevertheless, he seemed to sense, in her reply, the presence of a gesture—a gesture that might be interpreted, rather breathlessly, as an invitation to be seated. Perhaps that explains why his chair moved ever so little.

"May I wait here?" he asked. "That is—would you mind?"

The woman smiled. He could not have been mistaken about that gesture.

"Not at all," she said. "That's what I am doing, you see."

"Thank you."

Sitting opposite her, he had better opportunity to study the quick succession of moods that seemed to flit across her face, enhancing her charm. He became so absorbed, in fact, that he sud-

denly realized that he had permitted a noticeable gap in the conversation.

"Well, here we are—both waiting," he remarked abruptly. "Odd, isn't it, that we should be similarly employed—or unemployed?"

She shrugged her bare shoulders.

"Rather a nuisance, I think. I mean," she added hastily, "I always dislike being caught waiting for some one. It implies that one is prompt—which is annoying; or that one is anxious—which is worse."

He smiled his appreciation of this, and then plunged again.

"I suppose you must have thought me fearfully absent-minded—or rude—or something, when I started to sit down without so much as a glance to make certain that I was—where I belonged?"

"I'm afraid I didn't think about it at all," she replied, with another of her expressive shrugs, as if to explain the omission with a gesture. "Anyhow," she continued, "the tragedy of an empty chair is a minor affair—compared to the tragedy of an empty stomach."

"I say," he retorted, in a tone which seemed to imply his complete sympathy with her observation, "do let me order something for you—while we're waiting."

She smiled.

"Supposing the rightful occupant of that chair should appear?"

"The usurper is not apt to relinquish his advantage without a struggle," he said.

"But I shouldn't care for a struggle, you know," she returned, her eyes dancing. "Even as an innocent bystander, I'm afraid it might take away my appetite. And appetite is like a good name—the thief of it takes something that 'enriches him not,' yet leaves the loser 'poor indeed.'"

"In that case, we'll take no chances,"

he said, signaling the waiter from his post of watchful accessibility.

He made a hasty selection from the menu card.

"Will you supplement my suggestions?" he asked, looking up.

She shook her head.

"No, not a single alteration," she said. After the waiter had left, she glanced around the room. "Your—friend is slow in arriving," she added.

"She usually is." He paused. "And yours?"

"Invariably."

"Why did you choose to wait here instead of in the larger dining room across the lobby?" he asked.

"Because of the music, which—unlike good little children—is heard, but not seen, and because of the rose-shaded candles on the table."

"The candles are attractive," he admitted.

"Attractive is as attractive does," she returned. "The rose shades are so—thoughtful."

"In what way?"

"In a very feminine way. When a woman is worldly, they make her appear very innocent. When she is innocent, they make her appear very worldly."

"Then they are a form of deception, I should say."

She smiled across the table.

"Not of deception, my friend, but of illusion. Men seldom appreciate the distinction."

It was his turn to thrust.

"Perhaps that is because they usually are the victims of both," he said.

"If they are victims of deception, it is because they have too much vanity; if they are victims of illusion, it is because they have too little imagination."

"You leave us little to preen ourselves about," he observed.

"I find that is the only safe way to begin a friendship with a man."

"But I hardly flattered myself that you wished that," came his quick answer.

"You are quite right," she replied. "I was merely clearing the decks—in case I should. Besides, you must remember that I am not your ordained dinner companion to-night."

"Nor am I yours."

"I haven't forgotten," she said.

The waiter had returned with their order, and they were silent for a moment. It was the woman who made the next remark.

"Don't you think it rather odd that your friend hasn't appeared?" she queried. "You really don't seem at all disturbed."

He looked at her as if to gauge the reception of his reply.

"To be quite frank, I'm not disturbed," he began slowly. "You see, there wasn't any one."

"I see," she said in a low voice, after a pause.

"Please don't be offended," he pleaded. "You aren't, are you?"

"Of course I'm not," she answered. "Don't be absurd!"

"Thank you," he said, with a smile of unfeigned relief. "And I suppose I oughtn't to have noticed, but—since we are on the subject—I don't think you have appeared particularly disconcerted over the nonarrival of your—friend. Possibly there isn't any one, in your case as well as mine?"

She gave him a merry smile.

"I quite agree with you that you shouldn't have noticed, but—you are quite right. There isn't any one."

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "Then our myths cancel each other."

"That's a man's way of putting it."

"Thank you again," he smiled. "Will you be dining here to-morrow night?"

"I might."

Their eyes met across the table.

"And will the chair opposite be tilted?"

"It might."

"Then I shall know just what course I must pursue."

She laughed.

"I think you have your strategy quite well planned," she said.

"Strategy" is hardly the correct word for it, I guess," he remarked, in a changed tone and with a sudden hardness leaping into his eyes.

"I don't quite understand," she said quickly, baffled by the unaccountable change in his manner.

"You will in a very few moments," he replied. "You see, we can't continue the butterfly game."

"I still don't understand you," she said, with a hint of a shrug.

He was fingering the handle of his coffee spoon.

"You've been so nice about it, you know," he began slowly. "And I do hate awfully to have to say what—what I've got to say. You see—well, I'm not a guest at this hotel at all. Now do you understand? I'm a private detective, and I've been employed here to put a stop to just the kind of accidental meetings that—well, just the sort of thing you have encouraged just now. I'm mighty sorry, but this means a charge against you—and a courthouse appearance in the morning."

Instead of the defiance or the alarm which he imagined this declaration would evoke, he was astonished to see his companion break into a delighted laugh.

"Oh, I say," she gasped, at the end of a merry outburst, "this is rare! Prepare yourself for a shock, Mr. Detective. You've been so nice, too, and I hate awfully——" Here she ran off into another peal of mirth. "Oh, don't you understand yet? Don't you see? I'm a private detective myself, and I was sent here to put a stop to just the same sort of thing that you—— Well, if you don't believe me, here is my card."

She drew a bit of pasteboard from her purse and held it before his eyes.

"Well, I'll be—— I beg pardon. Here is my card, too," the man exclaimed abruptly.

"Now we're even again," the woman replied. "And no one can accuse us of loafing on the job, do you think?"

"Perhaps not," he said. "Just the same, I think you and I had better look up the manager of this hotel, right after dinner."

"What for?" she asked. "To make a report?"

"Report? Nonsense!" he retorted. "I want an introduction."



MOTHS

DEAR, delicate ladies, frail
And lost these summers past,
You of the scarf and fan and veil,
Where do you fare at last?

Where are you, now that darkness brings,
Across the nights of June,
Dear, delicate gauze of wings,
Under the pallid moon?

DAVID MORTON.

Ainslee's Book of the Month

BLUE ALOES, by Cynthia Stockley; G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York; \$1.50.

LIFE in a British colony is character building, adventurous, wholesomely outdoors—yes, all of those things and some others equally commendable which do not at the moment occur to the reviewer. But if the Anglo-Saxon dominates too emphatically, we shall look in vain for romance of the more sophisticated kind. The ruling whites will be respectably colorless, the native population drab.

South Africa has all the traditional virtues of a British colony, but is saved from mediocrity by the Boers and the influx of cosmopolitan fortune seekers to the diamond mines of the Rand. It provides Cynthia Stockley with apparently unlimited material for fiction. Her latest volume contains four admirable stories. They measure up to the high standard set by her earlier successes.

In the title novelette, "Blue Aloes," the heroine, Christine Chaine, is introduced to us as governess on a Karoo farm. She is an Englishwoman, embittered by an unfortunate love affair at home and seeking a seclusion which, of course, she does not find.

That a tragedy is brooding over the farm is made clear from the start. The owner, Van Cannan, and his wife are an oddly matched pair, the man jealous and unhappy, the woman sinister. The three children are normal, but the life of the only boy is threatened; his brother had died mysteriously a short while before. The manner in which the warning is conveyed to the governess is hair-raising—a whisper at night through a closed shutter and a foul

odor permeating the room. One feels that he is on the threshold of a horror as gruesome as any devised by Poe. The situation, however, proves to be not so terrible, after all; it is merely ingenious and very African.

A Kafir nurse, a villain, and a good-looking hero play leading rôles. The last named proves his title to Christine's love, after having been suspected of conducting an intrigue with the farmer's wife.

The second novelette is "The Leopard." The name is that of a mine owned by a lovable wastrel, Lundi Druro. His vice is gambling. He has a way of allowing poker to drive even the most attractive engagements with women out of his head. Once he had flunked an appointment at the altar, because he preferred a night-and-day game at the club. By forgetting to dance with her, he offends the girl who means most to him. When a scheming beauty gives a ball in his honor, he forgets that just as easily. But he is the sort that is always pardoned by women. A strong love story develops. Both Lundi and one of his admirers are wounded near the mine by a real leopard, and complications follow which keep the reader breathless to the last paragraph.

"Rosanne Ozanne" and "April Folly" round out an artistic volume. Cynthia Stockley is one of the few writers who can tell an adventure story and make her characters as interesting for their own sakes as for the things that happen to them. She extracts more romance from British colonial life than any author since Rudyard Kipling.

W. A. R.



PLAYS AND PLAYERS

By

EDWIN CARTY RANCK

THE most notable feature of the past theatrical season in New York was the revival of romance. In the last number of *AINSLIE'S*, I said something about the managerial gratification of the public taste for other things besides Huns and hysteria. Since that was written, there has been a new spring drive of romance, and yet the public, like Oliver Twist, cries hungrily for more. And while plays of purely romantic appeal are, in the vernacular of Broadway, "turning 'em away," it is most significant that Maurice Maeterlinck's ambitious attempt to give us another Belgian war play was an utter failure. *Monsieur Maeterlinck's play, "A Burgomaster of Belgium,"* was withdrawn after a month's stay at the Belmont Theater. Belgium's wound is too fresh, her groans of agony too recent, to make the dramatization of her heroism a prudent subject for any dramatist, be he never so famous.

Toward the end of the season, playgoers witnessed many interesting and ambitious experiments in the theater, one of the most interesting being the first production of the Theater Guild, a group of actors mainly recruited from the ranks of the Washington Square Players, who promise to give New Yorkers many worth-while productions during the—it is to be hoped—long life of the Guild. This first production at

the Garrick, the home of the Theater du Vieux Colombier for several seasons, was noteworthy for another reason also. The play selected was "*The Bonds of Interest*," a costume comedy in three acts by Jacinto Benavente, the well-known Spanish dramatist. It was the play's first production in this country "on any stage" and proved to be a sort of Spanish "*Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford*," with the locale in the seventeenth century instead of the twentieth.

The comedy concerns itself with the amusing adventures of Leander, a rather obtuse and stupid adventurer who possesses, however, a nimble-witted servant named Crispin. Leander is penniless, but he falls madly in love with a charming heiress and, with the assistance of the admirable Crispin, wins her in spite of all obstacles.

"*The Bonds of Interest*" might not have proved a particularly good investment for the theatrical speculator, however, had it not been for the exquisite costumes and settings, which were designed by Rollo Peters. They were pictorial poems, and against such a background even the somewhat indifferent acting of the cast appeared actually better than it was, although Miss Helen Westley, as a seventeenth-century lady of quality, acted with her usual distinction. Miss Westley possesses an intelligence that is rare on

our stage, and it enables her to grasp the dramatist's intent and make the most of it. Besides Miss Westley, there were sixteen other actors, including Henry Herbert, who appeared as the *Doctor*, bringing out most admirably the humorous nuances of the part. The poet, Edna 'St. Vincent Millay,' whose work appears regularly in AINSLEE'S, lent great charm to the rôle of *Columbine*.

From the point of view of acting alone, "The Jest," by Sem Benelli, the Italian dramatist, who wrote the libretto of the grand opera, "The Love of the Three Kings," was the most notable drama produced during the season. It served as a dual starring vehicle for John and Lionel Barrymore, both of whom scored personal triumphs in a melodrama of fustian and fury. The late Jack London was fond of emphasizing the importance of "red blood" in fiction. Well, "The Jest" oozes red blood from every pore. Written ten years ago, it has served Sarah Bernhardt well in Paris, where she played the part created in this country by John Barrymore. To me, the play is very suggestive of "The Fool's Revenge," a lurid melodrama that gave the late E. S. Willard and many other well-known actors a chance to throw an emotional fit. The only difference is that "The Jest" gives two actors chances to throw two fits.

John Barrymore plays the part of *Giannetto Malespini*, a refined and spineless young painter who seeks revenge upon Neri and Gabriello Chiaramantesi, who have made him the butt of a cruel practical joke. He succeeds in spreading broadcast a report that Neri is mad. Then he has a liaison with Neri's mistress, Ginevra, but their embraces are interrupted by Neri, who, with the roar of an infuriated lion, rushes into Ginevra's bedroom and in a red rage slays a man that he thinks is Giannetto, only to discover that the

murdered man is his own brother. Then he goes mad, and Giannetto has the last laugh, although "The Jest" is not a merry one.

With the exception of their exasperating mannerisms, both the Barrymores were excellent. John Barrymore really grasped the part of the effeminate, cowardly, treacherous *Giannetto* and in the second act, where he meets *Ginevra*, his acting transcended anything else that I have ever seen him do, not even excepting his remarkable performance in Galsworthy's "Justice." If John Barrymore can master his theatricalism, his self-conscious posturings, his awareness of himself, as it were, he will develop into our foremost actor. But he needs to put himself through a severe course of self-discipline. I cannot imagine a Booth trying to obtain emotional effects by theatricalism. He would have considered it stepping out of the part. Yet John Barrymore seeks and destroys effects through his eagerness to command the spotlight. This is literally true, for in "Redemption" the spotlight was thrown full upon his face, while the other actors in the scene who didn't happen to be *matinée* idols played in total darkness. This protruding egotism marred the scene and made it absurd.

Lionel Barrymore at the present time is the more assured artist of the two, although he possesses neither the sensitiveness nor the potential greatness of John. He played *Neri*, the captain of the Mercenaries, with a brutal ferocity and a plastic primitiveness that was almost epic. With masterly art, he suggested the sinister cruelty of the man, and when the audience heard a door slam and listened to the sinister footsteps of the approaching giant, more than one woman in the audience cried out. Here was tense drama without a word being spoken, and it was all due to the manner in which Lionel Barrymore characterized the lurking lion in

the man's make-up. It was, if one may coin such an expression, "creative motivation."

Maude Hanaford as *Ginevra*, the ruthlessly mercenary mistress of the Mercenary, showed just the proper lack of warmth that the part needed. This was no amorous woman with soft arms waiting for a man; she was a frigid-blooded bit of feminine cat, ready with a purr for the first hand that fed her. And that is the way Miss Hanaford played the part.

The stage settings, designed by Robert E. Jones, were rich and massive and aided very perceptibly in establishing the romantic atmosphere of illusion so necessary in the development of fusion drama. The big banquet hall, for instance, was Jones at his best, and was a distinct aid to the dramatic entrance of *Giannetto*, wrapped in his white cloak and partnered by his deformed friend, *Fazio*. It is the most effective work I have ever seen Jones do. Usually he "hurls a pot of paint in the public's face," but this time he wisely stayed his hand.

"Papa," a rococo comedy by Zoe Akins, reached the stage after a five-year struggle and died of inanition after six nights on Broadway. That isn't quite the record of short life in theatrical No Man's Land. The record is held by a musical comedy called "Yvette," which had the honor of lasting for one night.

"Papa" concerns the efforts of a lot of papier-mâché persons of the female species to claim an illegitimate child as their own. The paternity is fixed on one man because it looks daring and fashionable for him to have had an "affair" in the past. In another scene, the real father, a grand-opera singer, cannot remember whether the mother is one sister or another. And out of this flimsy material Miss Akins has built her play. Some of the lines are clever and the play is written with

a certain distinction—as I pointed out in a review several years ago when it was published in book form—but there is not enough to it for a full-length comedy. It would, however, make an admirable one-act play.

Probably the most asinine play of the entire season was "A Good Bad Woman," which wasn't even a good bad play. Such actors as Margaret Illington, Wilton Lackaye, Robert Edeson, and Katherine Kaelred were wasted in drama that was lost in a wilderness of words. A young wife is fearful of becoming a mother and consults a physician, who leads her to believe that he has prevented such a contingency. But he has deceived her for her own good, and every one is happy but the audience when the final curtain descends.

The Greenwich Village Theater might perform a real service to playgoers who do not belong to the tired-business-man cult if it would only extend its experiments in the right direction. But it wastes good money and squanders the talents of a stage decorator like Livingston Platt by esoteric experiments that weary even the most devout sandal wearer in the Village. For instance, they recently produced, at a series of special Tuesday and Friday matinées, that ancient Sanskrit play "Shakuntala" by Kalidasa. It is a sort of Hindu "Romeo and Juliet" and reads much better than it acts. Many learned dramatic critics will probably try to tell us that it is real art and all that sort of thing, but it won't fool the discriminating playgoer. I should call it defunct art. Beatrice Prentice plays the part of *Shakuntala*, the passionate Hindu maiden who falls in love with a king, and she plays it very badly. This young actress, who made a favorable impression several seasons ago in "The Yellow Jacket," seems to have a promising future behind her. If she will only be natural and quit posturing,

she may succeed in placing her future where it rightfully belongs.

But one of the queerest things that has happened in a long time was a special Sunday-night performance of a hybrid blank-verse drama by Thomas Broadhurst, brother of George Broadhurst, yclept "Medea," which gave the playgoer an excellent opportunity to see how a Broadway dramatist could "put it all over" a Greek dramatist. Mr. Broadhurst is to be congratulated upon his temerity. As to his work—well, I should prefer to be discreetly silent. Blanche Bates played the part of the Broadway *Medea*.

Another play by this same Mr. Broadhurst was seen recently. It was called "Our Pleasant Sins" and was the old, old story of a philandering husband and a trusting wife. The wife, in order to get even, has an affair with a masculine friend that almost ends disastrously. But—thank Heaven for this concession at any rate—it isn't the wife who "pays and pays and pays." No, she is taken back by a contrite husband and her head is reclining in the usual place when the last gong is sounded. It is very sweet, very trite, and altogether innocuous, and Conway Tearle, Henrietta Crosman, and other excellent players were wasted in situations that have worn threadbare.

Maurice Maeterlinck's drama, "A Burgomaster of Belgium," is the story of a burgomaster who tried to protect his people during the German invasion and was held a hostage by the Huns when one of their officers was shot. A victim is demanded, and if one is not forthcoming, the burgomaster must die. By the sort of coincidence that conveniently happens in the imaginations of dramatists, the officer in charge of the firing squad is the son-in-law of the burgomaster. At any rate, the burgomaster will make no concessions to the Huns and dies like a hero. The play was well acted, but it deservedly

failed. It was badly written and, frankly, it looked to me like a Maeterlinckian potboiler.

There is nothing much new and nothing much worth while in "Luck in Pawn," the first play from the pen—or typewriter—of Marvin Taylor. One of those bored young rich men—another first aid to the dramatist—falls in love with a simple maid who is out of cash and out of luck. But a rich Jewish gentleman "stakes her." In other words, he puts up enough money for her to appear to be what she isn't. A society "cat" purs the secret and the rich young man discovers the deception, but loves the out-of-luck young lady just the same. Mabel Taliaferro was winsomely wistful as the heroine, and Roland Young made the hero all that he should have been. Robert Fischer added to his reputation as a character actor by his portrayal of the Jewish money lender.

However, after studying the reigning successes in New York during the past season, I am willing to go on record with the statement that, among American playwrights who are actively writing for the stage to-day, Miss Rachel Crothers easily leads all the rest. This is merely my individual opinion, but I base it upon actual achievement. Miss Crothers is the author of "The Three of Us," "A Man's World," "The Herfords," and many other plays, and in all of her work it has been characterization that has appealed to her—characterization plus drama and humor. During the season that recently closed, she wrote two highly successful plays—"A Little Journey," which I reviewed in the last number of AINSLEE'S, and "39 East," her latest play, which promises to be just as successful as "A Little Journey."

"39 East" is merely the story of a young girl in New York. She is naïve and unsophisticated, and the scenes,

like those of Edgar Selwyn's play, "The Country Boy," are laid in a boarding house, the number of which is 39 East. At a crucial moment, the young girl is rescued from the clutches of an unscrupulous theatrical manager by a rather conventional hero. That is, baldly speaking, the plot, but it is Miss Crothers' treatment of this shopworn theme that makes her a playwright of distinction. Her characters are deftly drawn and differentiated from one another, and her situations are always the outgrowth of character rather than situation.

"In drama," says George Pierce Baker, professor of dramatic literature in Harvard University, "undoubtedly the strongest immediate appeal to the general public is action. Yet if a dramatist is to communicate with his audience as he wishes, command of dialogue is indispensable. The *permanent value* of a play, however, rests on its characterization. Characterization focuses attention. It is the chief means of creating in an audience sympathy

for the subject or the people of the play."

Judging then, the *permanent value* of a play, I find that among contemporary playwrights there are very few whose work has any permanent value because the writers have been much more interested in "big scenes," "punch," and so forth than they have in creating real characters. Publish this ephemeral output in book form and its artificiality and claptrap would be painfully apparent to the reader.

Miss Crothers is more concerned with limning a character than devising some hell-roarin' situation. She gives us a character that we recognize as an authentic human being, and then she places this character in a certain environment and waits for things to happen. They begin to happen—just as they happen in real life—and it is the reaction of this individual to certain influences that furnishes Miss Crothers with her drama. She is a real creative artist who has been true to herself and to the best traditions of stagecraft.



THE TRAPEZE PERFORMER

PIERCE little bombs of gleam snap from his spangles,
 Sleek flames glow softly on his silken tights,
 The waiting crowd blurs to crude darks and whites
 Beneath the lamps that stare like savage bangles;
 Safe in a smooth and sweeping arc he dangles
 And sees the tanbark tower like old heights
 Before careening eyes. At last he sights
 The waiting hands, and sinuously untangles.

Over the sheer abyss, so deadly near,
 He falls, like wine to its appointed cup;
 Turns in a wheel of fireworks, and is mine.
 Battering hands acclaim our triumph clear.
 And steadfast muscles draw my sonnet up
 To the firm iron of the fourteenth line.

STEPHEN VINCENT BENET.

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

HOW do you like this magazine?

One of the objects of our monthly talks is to get you to answer this question, because frank letters from you aid us to keep in touch with your tastes and give you what you want. Letters stating in a general way that the reader "likes AINSLEE'S" are gratifying; we get many in every mail. But we invite specific criticism. We are anxious to have you say: "Such and such a story is good, because—" et cetera; or, "I want more of such and such an author's work." We feel sure you realize the mutual advantage to be derived from free discussion of the material we publish. To start the ball rolling, we ask you the following questions: "What do you think of the complete novelette in the present issue?" "Do you prefer exotic stories like 'Now' and 'The Little Chasm Rose,' strong stories like 'The Light,' or clever stories like 'The Door' and 'Poor Pierrot,' all in July?" "Do you find our dramatic department and monthly book reviews interesting?" "What is your opinion of the verse we publish?" "Do you like the 'More' Super-Women' series?" "Who is your favorite AINSLEE author?" We look forward to receiving your answers and shall quote from some of them in future talks.

JUNE WILLARD, Vennette Herron, and Anice Terhune have told you about themselves in recent numbers. Here is Mrs. Du Vernet Rabell's own portrait, submitted at our request:

"Nowadays they call it taking an interest in your fellow men. When I was small, they called it being a busybody. I was one. My idea of beginning an

acquaintance was to give a full account of myself, finishing up with an explanation of just how I happened to be in that particular spot at that particular time. Then I would fold my small hands and wait expectantly for my companion to do the same. They often must have done so, because my memory is full of odd bits of personal history of all kinds, queer snatches like the torn pieces of movie film. I talked with men who had gambling concessions in Honduras, and who took me into the native quarters for tortillas, to my conventional mother's intense horror. I got to know gentle-mannered remittance men I picked up on the hotel veranda in Vancouver. And always I prattled, and asked questions—and remembered. And so I came to write. Some one once said of me that I had three ambitions; to run a yellow automobile, to own an English bulldog, and to write a successful play. I drive the car and I own the dog; but I have yet to write the play."

NEXT month's fiction offering includes some of the best tales we have ever published. There will be a long installment of Vennette Herron's serial, "The Joyous Dreamer;" "The Rim," by Bonnie Ginger, a love story in which the reader is taken from Manila to the Grand Cañon, via San Francisco; "Heyday o' the Blood," by Elizabeth Burgess Hughes; "The Stone Serpent," introducing Paul Hervey Fox, a writer new to AINSLEE'S; and "Indian Giver," by Gladys Hall. The super-woman described by Anice Terhune is Tzu H'si, the amazing dowager empress of China.



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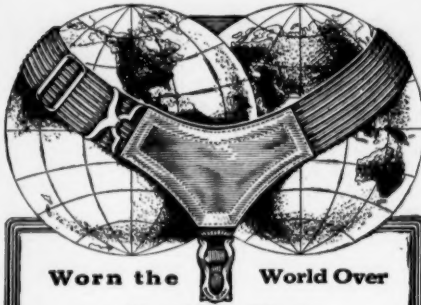
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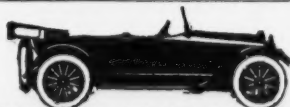
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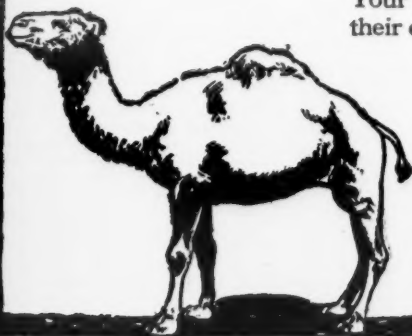
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